RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES IN ADOLESCENT PROSOCIAL CROSS-GROUP INTERACTIONS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY AMONG STUDENTS IN CHRISTIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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by

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This dissertation completed by

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Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES IN ADOLESCENT PROSOCIAL CROSS-GROUP INTERACTIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AMONG STUDENTS IN CHRISTIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Adolescent prosocial development concerns all who work with teenagers. A central prosocial value in the Christian faith tradition is to treat others, especially those outside one's friend group, with kindness. The purpose of this study is to provide practical insights about adolescent prosocial cross-group interactions for those who work with young people in Christian schools, churches, and homes.

This study asks the following questions: What are the religious and spiritual influences that motivate adolescents to behave prosocially toward their peers who are outside their social group? How do those influences operate in the complex and dynamic social world of adolescence? What can we learn about cross-group interactions from the stories of students who walk the halls of Christian high schools?

This is a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews in which students were invited to tell stories about their acts of kindness. The narrative emphasis supports a practical theology framework which seeks to learn from the lived experience of students. Analysis includes dialogue between the interview data, the literature, and the author's professional and personal experience with the topic. The literature review draws from work in education, neuroscience, social science, and theology. The philosophical approach to the research holds constructivism

and theism in creative tension in order to better understand religious and spiritual influences on adolescent prosocial behavior.

Participants included 15 female students and six male students in grades 10-12 from eight Catholic and Protestant schools in Southern California. Single setting interviews ranged in length from 17-49 minutes. All participants demonstrated a clear interest in kindness but several provided negative case analysis by stating that religion and spirituality did not influence their acts of kindness.

Four major themes emerged as areas in which religious and spiritual influences contribute to adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. These themes are presence, modeling, resources, and education. Each theme also includes a range of other motivational factors in addition to religious and spiritual influences.

Presence is the willingness to be with another person in a caring, attentive, and supportive role. Significant influences include: God's presence; adults and peers functioning as tools of God's providence; and communities of faith that prioritize a comprehensive theology of presence in the church, church school, and home.

Modeling is the representation of kindness in ways that are relevant, impactful, and inspiring. Significant influences include: God's example; adults and peers modeling through deeds and testimonies; schools and churches modeling through religious symbolism, stories, and events; and communities of faith that comprehensively integrate word and deed.

Resources are those elements of social capital that empower adolescents to reach out and perform acts of kindness for others, especially for those outside their friend group. Significant influences include: God's power; everyday acts of kindness; specific resources for particular

needs; and communities of faith that prioritize making social capital available and accessible to students.

Education is creating a safe and inspirational space where intrinsically motivated kindness can be experienced and learned through action and reflection. Significant influences include: God's guidance; pedagogy that develops the social brain; learning through experience, reflection, and leadership; and communities of faith that prioritize caring and kindness as both visible and hidden curriculum.

Communities of faith that listen to their adolescents and include them in planning and implementing initiatives for prosocial behavior can utilize the many existing motivational mechanisms, religious and non-religious, to prioritize, encourage, and support acts of kindness among their teens.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my three children who are all teenagers!

I am inspired by the kindness I see in all three of your lives and I hope to continue to encourage and support your growth as young people who show kindness across all social groups.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my wife for her loving support, unfailing encouragement, and gracious patience throughout this journey.

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Finally, I wish to thank all the students who participated in this study for their dedication to showing kindness to others and their willingness to share their stories with me.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

Anna[1] is a new student and a senior at a local Christian high school. This is her sixth school and she tells me she has been bullied a lot over the years and has gone through some difficult times in her personal life. Anna describes herself as someone with "thick skin" and who is like a "big sister that is super protective" toward other students who are "outsiders." She shares a story from the start of the school year in which she befriended a girl who was always alone.

> I would walk around by myself at times and I noticed there was this other girl, who I thought was new at the time because she always sat by herself. She's been here since her freshman year, but she just didn't have a friend group. She was awkward and quiet and nobody wanted to sit with her. So I was like, "I'm new and she's by herself," so I decided to become her friend. At first, she rejected me. I guess she didn't want to be my friend, so I just let her be. As time went on, I found my new friend group and she would watch us and I felt like she was feeling a little bit jealous. So what I did was I incorporated her into my friend group and pretty soon we got her to talk, smile, and feel more comfortable.

Anna and I talk more about what motivates her to be kind to teens outside her friend group. Anna wants to help classmates who are alone because, in the past, she "did not enjoy being that person." She also tries to reach out to other teens as if they were her own siblings because "if my siblings were alone I would like it if someone would help them." She tells a story from her freshman year to explain another reason she has become a young person who shows kindness to other teens outside her friend group.

[1] All participant names and some narrative details have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

> At one point, when I was alone, I was in a dark place and I tried to isolate myself as much as I could from anyone. But there was this guy that was my friend. He became my friend because he noticed that I was always gloomy and kind of wanted to be by myself. He made it his goal to make me smile at least once every day… I really appreciated him for making me smile and actually helping me look forward to going to school. He didn't know me too well, eventually he got to know me, but he did that good to me and I want to spread that good to someone else.

In this story, Anna responds to the kindness given to her by choosing to reach out to others in a similar way.

When I ask Anna about the role spirituality and religion play in her motivation to be kind, she expands the story of her friend who made her smile each day.

> At that time, when I had all that weight on my shoulders, I actually cried and started praying. I just prayed for a sign, prayed for help. Then when my other friend somehow came into my life, little did I know that God sent my friend to "Make her smile at least once. Make her laugh." I saw that, me crying for help, it was answered. I was being heard. So I feel like I can go up to God whenever I'm in any sort of distress, even if I'm happy or sad, any emotion, and I can do anything with him by my side or watching over me. That inspires me to go out there. I'd rather be the first student to take the first step because there's nothing wrong being kind to others, even if it's a person nobody likes. Might as well reach out, this is high school.

Anna's experience is only one example of the many different types of situations that adolescents face every day in their social worlds. They must tend to their own social well-being as well as make decisions about how to treat others. Most communities hope that their young people will learn to make prosocial choices to be kind to others. And not just kind to their friends, but also to those who are outside their social group.

Over the past twenty years, as a religious educator in a Christian secondary school, I have seen our school community invest in Christian education so that our young people can grow in their relationships with God and each other. Many parents who send their children to a Christian school hope it will help their kids avoid antisocial behavior and develop prosocial behavior. Those of us who work in religious education care deeply about the young people who walk our

halls and sit in our classrooms and we constantly look for the best ways to encourage and support the prosocial development of our students.

One central prosocial value in the Christian faith tradition is that we treat others with kindness. Jesus identified this value when he responded to a question about which commandment is the greatest. "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"[2] When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, he challenged his religious community to expand their definition of "neighbor" to include a much wider group of people than just their immediate social group.[3] As Christian educators, if we are to help young people follow the example of Jesus, our focus on prosocial behavior ought to include how to be kind to our neighbors who are outside our circle of family and friends.

This study asks the following questions: What are the religious and spiritual influences that motivate adolescents to behave prosocially toward their peers who are outside their social group? How do those influences operate in the complex and dynamic social world of adolescence? What can we learn about cross-group interactions from the stories of students who walk the halls of Christian high schools? The qualitative approach of this study aims to address these questions in the context of lived experience and to give a voice to adolescents in contributing to a study of their social world. The findings create a dialogue between existing research and theory and the unique experiences and stories of the participants and the researcher. My goal in this study is to create a window by which those of us who work with adolescents can see a thick perspective on teen prosociality that will lead to practical and concrete insights for

[2] Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV).
[3] Luke 10:25-37 (NIV).

encouraging and supporting adolescents in their development of prosocial behavior and cross-group acts of kindness.

This chapter introduces the research project and provides an overview for the dissertation. The section, Definitions, provides discussion on key terminology in the study. The section, Background, provides a brief look at how prosocial research developed and how it now includes specific studies in religious and spiritual influences. The section, Methodology, gives a concise summary of how this study was conducted. Finally, the section, Organization, briefly covers the organization of the document.

Definitions

Definitions of key terms can bring clarity to research. Definitions can also hinder inquiry and complexity in research. The following definitions are offered as working models from the literature to create a starting point for the dialogue with the life experiences and perspectives of the research participants. For the purposes of this study, I address a definition of prosocial behavior and several definitions of key terms that are part of the prosocial family. These terms are kindness, compassion, caring, altruism, hospitality, and love. I also discuss definitions for cross-group interaction, religion, and spirituality. These terms form a significant part of the dialogue between the literature and the findings from the interviews.

Prosocial Behavior

The study of prosocial behavior has grown to include many different disciplines and methodologies, but the basic working definition, provided by Mussen and Eisenberg back in 1977, still stands and is often cited in current research projects.

> Prosocial behavior refers to actions that are intended to aid or benefit another person or group of people without the actor's anticipation of external rewards. Such actions often

> entail some cost, self-sacrifice, or risk on the part of the actor. A wide variety of behaviors is encompassed by this rubric, including generosity, altruism, sympathy, helping people in distress by giving material or psychological assistance, sharing possessions, donating to charity, and participating in activities designed to improve the general welfare by reducing social injustices, inequalities, and brutality.[4]

Over the years, this definition has been tweaked, expanded, shortened, and discussed, but overall, the central concept can be stated as behavior that benefits others without expectation of reward.

I began this study by examining the literature on adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. As I prepared to visit the schools to recruit participants I chose to frame the research in terms more familiar to teens. I described my research goal to the students as "trying to understand what motivates you to be kind to others outside your friend group." During the recruitment phase students were clearly familiar with the term kindness and a number of them resonated with the idea of being kind to others. In the interviews the participants expressed their own views on what kindness looks like in their social world. Initially, I was concerned that using the term kindness would limit the responses of the participants from including the entire range of Mussen and Eisenberg's classic definition of prosocial behavior. However, most of the concepts in their definition are illustrated by the teens in the interviews.

Kindness

Prosocial literature often includes kindness as one of many related behaviors. Since kindness is a distinct and practical concept, definitions from the literature are helpful at this point for both the larger literature review in the next chapter and for the ensuing dialogue in the chapters on the findings. Peterson and Seligman define kindness as part of a grouping of prosocial behaviors. "Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love,

[4] Paul Henry Mussen and Nancy Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring, Sharing, and Helping: The Development of Prosocial Behavior in Children* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1977), 3-4.

'niceness']: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them."[5] The authors also assert that kindness carries an affective response to the common humanity of the other that goes beyond acting out of duty or principle alone.[6] Hamrick creates separation between kindness and the cognates of niceness, courtesy, and gentleness, by arguing that "kindness can exist in the absence of these qualities – I can 'get tough' with the addict or the able student who is unintelligibly failing, because I fear that any gentleness, niceness, and so on would only offer illusory comfort."[7] Hardy and Carlo add the concept of everyday interaction to the definition of kindness.[8] Soskice cites the Middle English origins of the word kind which is similar to the idea of kin. She links the idea to one of Christianity's doctrines of God as incarnate in Jesus Christ. "In Middle English the words 'kind' and 'kin' were the same – to say that Christ is 'our kinde Lord' is not to say that Christ is tender and gentle, although that may be implied, but to say that he is kin – our kind. This fact, and not emotional disposition, is the rock which is our salvation."[9] The literature on kindness alerts us to several key elements of this concept. Kindness shares the general prosocial behaviors of caring and helping, especially in the context of everyday relationships, but kindness also can manifest in making difficult decisions for the

[5] Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 28. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/DTL/detail.action?docID=279797.
[6] Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 326.
[7] William S. Hamrick, *Kindness and the Good Society: Connections of the Heart*, Suny Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 22-23. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/DTL/detail.action?docID=3407898.
[8] Sam A. Hardy and Gustavo Carlo, "Religiosity and Prosocial Behaviours in Adolescence: The Mediating Role of Prosocial Values," *Journal of Moral Education* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 2005): 238. doi:10.1080/03057240500127210.
[9] Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/DTL/detail.action?docID=415900.

good of others. On a deep level, kindness affirms that we are all of one common humanity which creates a strong motivation to be for others whether based on emotion, principle, or identity.

Compassion

Compassion is also included as a significant concept in the literature on prosocial behavior. The word has its origins in the idea of suffering with another person and being motivated to care for them or comfort them.[10] Rogers expands this definition to include more than just comfort. "We define compassion as simply being moved in our depths by others' experiences and responding in a way that intends either to ease their suffering or promote their flourishing."[11] In this way, compassion is similar to kindness in that it seeks to do good things for others. Rogers breaks down compassion into six dimensions that serve as key steps to establishing a compassionate connection that leads to "tangible acts of healing, kindness, and care."[12] To a certain degree, Rogers creates some separation between the compassionate stance as motivation and the subsequent act of kindness. Dean and Foster understand the biblical model of compassion to lead to acts of healing and serving without the need to judge and fix the other person. Here, the emphasis is on being the one, like Jesus, who is willing to be with and for others, to suffer alongside them without judging them.[13] Rogers also sees a connection between compassion in humans and God as the source of compassion. "God is the source from which compassion flows; God's compassionate Spirit sustains all life."[14] We can take note that

[10] Ofra Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation: An Integrated Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 35.
[11] Frank Rogers, *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2016), 30.
[12] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 34. These six steps are: paying attention, understanding empathically, loving with connection, sensing the sacredness, embodying new life, and act.
[13] Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 113.
[14] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 42.

compassion involves noticing and understanding the needs of people which motivates us to be with others in accepting, comforting, and helpful ways.

Caring

Another term that has generated literature in the field of prosociality is caring. Mayseless defines good caregiving as "care that emanates from a concern for the other's welfare and happiness and needs to involve synchronization and coordination between caregiver and recipient."[15] Noddings draws inspiration from Martin Buber's "I/Thou" view of human relationships and pushes the definition of caring further to include the idea of a significant encounter. She writes: "When we behave ethically as ones-caring, we are not obeying moral principles – although, certainly, they may guide our thinking – but we are meeting the other in genuine encounters of caring and being cared for. There is commitment, and there is choice."[16] As with kindness and compassion, caring originates in seeing others as fellow human beings and treating them with deep respect. Caring also implies relationship over time that is based on a shared understanding of what is most helpful and sustainable.

Altruism

Within the scope of prosocial behavior, altruism has generated a significant amount of study and debate. Batson offers his definition of altruism as "a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare."[17] Altruism is usually understood as doing things for others without any benefit to the self and is directly challenged by egoism which argues that

[15] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation*, 255.
[16] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 175.
[17] C. Daniel Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.

all human acts are a form of serving the self.[18] Batson nuances his understanding of altruism by arguing that an act that brings one a feeling of satisfaction, because an altruistic goal was achieved, can still qualify as altruism.[19] While altruism and prosociality are sometimes used synonymously, prosociality tends to be seen as a larger umbrella term for helping behavior and altruism is included among other related prosocial behaviors. In some cases, the complexity of prosocial behavior reveals mixed motives that may not fall under pure altruism. On the other hand, all of the key elements of prosocial behaviors include the idea that the acts are performed without a clear demand or expectation of reward.

Hospitality

Hospitality is an idea that starts with creating an atmosphere of comfort and welcome for others but also includes some of the more challenging aspects of prosocial behavior. Calhoun points out how the early church practiced hospitality in their homes and created safe spaces for people. She says, "Hospitality is one way we become God's welcoming arms in a big and often hostile world."[20] Yong pushes the idea of hospitality to include Derrida's play on the word host, indicating that the host is hostage to the visitor.[21] Yong tempers this challenge by acknowledging the importance of preserving the boundaries of one's self, but his intent is to remind us that genuine acts of hospitality can and will place the self in situations that are uncomfortable and

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[18] C. D. Batson, "Empathy-Induced Altruistic Motivation," in *Prosocial Motives, Emotions, and Behavior: The Better Angels of our Nature*, eds. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 16.
[19] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 22.
[20] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, Revised and Expanded Ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 162.
[21] Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 120. http://search.ebscohost.com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1901157&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

risky.[22] We cannot always be in charge of our prosocial acts. Hospitality inspires us to place ourselves in the service of others, hostage as it were, to their true needs and not simply our ideas of what they need. Within such a definition of hospitality exists a profound sense of welcome and safety for others.

Love

Love for others is considered by many to be the highest ideal for humans. Underwood seeks to deepen the definition and understanding of prosociality by using the term compassionate love. She defines compassionate love as a concept that includes acting on behalf of another at some cost to self, but she goes beyond the formulaic equations of cost and benefit to emphasize love as the deep encounters of people who clearly demonstrate love to each other. Underwood's concept of love is based on the complete acceptance of someone just for who they are.[23] In the Bible, Jesus demonstrates the deepest level of love by giving his life for others and he challenges his followers to do the same. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."[24] The apostle Paul declares that Jesus died, not just for his friends, but also for those who were not yet reconciled to him. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."[25] Most examples of prosocial behavior among teens are of everyday acts of kindness, caring, and compassion, however, the range of prosocial behavior includes the highest and deepest forms of love toward others, sometimes in situations of bitter hostility and seemingly impossible

[22] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 123.
[23] Lynn G. Underwood, "Compassionate Love: A Framework for Research," in *The Science of Compassionate Love: Theory, Research, and Applications*, eds. Beverley Anne Fehr, Susan Sprecher, and Lynn G. Underwood (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 6. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9781444303070.ch1.
[24] John 15:12-13 (NIV).
[25] Romans 5:8 (NIV).

odds. Gopin, in his work with peacemakers in war-torn parts of the world, tells stories of people, young and old, who find ways to make bridges where it seems only a miracle could succeed. But he argues that these are not miracles, out of reach for the common human being, but rather, "just imperfect people who made a leap of love over an impossible boundary."[26] Love, then, accepts others for who they are and is willing to sacrifice and risk much in order to overcome division and stay connected to people. Some acts of love defy the odds and yet are still possible for all of us.

This brief survey of terms associated with the study of prosocial behavior shows both the complexity of the topic and the rich diversity of positive behaviors between people. I used the specific language of kindness in the interviews since it is more familiar for teens than the term prosocial. I chose to use the larger category of prosocial behavior in my analysis to allow for more connections between the interview data and the prosocial literature. The term prosocial is also significant in the context of adolescent research because it offsets the historical overemphasis on teenage antisocial behavior. This study endeavors to expand our understanding of adolescent prosocial behavior and to celebrate the dynamic expressions of prosocial acts in the lives of the students who volunteered to participate.

Cross-group interaction

Cross-group interaction is a term that describes encounters between people that belong to different groups, however, the differences may include a wide range of variables. In some cases, cross-group studies look at how people interact across deep divisions caused by war, hostility, and prejudice. In other cases, cross-group studies look at how people interact across the many other types of social divisions that humans encounter that seem more mild and yet can still be

[26] Marc Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 194.

socially traumatic, resulting in isolation and loneliness. In my approach to this study, I chose to describe prosocial cross-group interaction as acts of kindness done to anyone outside your friend group. Students were free to further define what that meant by their own choice of stories and comments. In some of the participant stories the cross-group interaction entailed little risk as the people involved were acquaintances but not close friends. In other stories there were greater risks as the people receiving kindness were unknown, unresponsive, or social outcasts.

Religion and spirituality

Two more key terms that benefit from some discussion are religion and spirituality. Li and Chow discuss the distinct but overlapping aspects of these two terms. Religion is generally seen as adherence to specific beliefs and practices while spirituality is often seen as an openness to, searching for, and discovering of the sacred.[27] Barna points out that historically, the two were seen as part of the same whole but recently a growing number of Christians talk about being spiritual but not religious (SBNR). For some, being SBNR is because their interest in religion wanes but they still believe in the divine. For others, being SBNR is an attempt to distance themselves from the perceived problems with institutional religion while preserving their desire to find and encounter the sacred.[28] I did not ask the participants directly about being SBNR but their stories and comments indicated a fair degree of sophistication regarding the terms spiritual and religious and how they understood the relationship between the terms.

Newberg describes the etymology of both terms, religion and spirituality.

> "Spirituality" is derived from the Middle English word "spiritus" which means "breath." In this regard, spirit referred to the basic component of life – the life-giving breath of the

[27] Kin-Kit Li and Wai-Yin Chow, "Religiosity/Spirituality and Prosocial Behaviors among Chinese Christian Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Values and Gratitude," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 7, no. 2 (2015): 150-51. doi:10.1037/a0038294.
[28] "Meet the 'Spiritual but Not Religious,'" Barna, April 6, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20191205040538/https://www.barna.com/research/meet-spiritual-not-religious/.

> individual. The word "religion" is generally thought to derive from both Germanic and English influences from words meaning "to bind." The implication here is that religion is a way to bind people to each other and ultimately to God. Spirituality on the other hand appears to refer to something intrinsic within us that either is our own essence, or the part of us that ultimately helps us find our path back to the God or that which is sacred.[29]

The challenge for researchers and practitioners alike is to avoid presuming a definitive understanding of both terms and listening carefully to how the people in our care understand and live out religion and spirituality. In this study, I have included an interview question specifically asking the adolescent participants to define both religion and spirituality. Their understandings and definitions also expand as they are explored in their stories and comments throughout the interview.

Background

Scientific interest in the prosocial behavior of children as we know it today can be traced back to approximately one hundred years ago. According to Mussen and Eisenberg, a number of studies in the 1920s examined moral development in children. However, these studies did not produce any findings that pointed to consistent behaviors and were thought to be failures. No further research was done for decades. The dynamic social changes of the 1960s reignited interest in the social sciences to again study prosocial behavior.[30] Mussen and Eisenberg refer to the highly publicized murder of Kitty Genovese, in 1964, as the event that energized research into why people choose to help or choose not help in situations of obvious need. Genovese was killed in a residential parking lot and thirty-eight people were aware of her plight and did nothing to help or intervene.[31]

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[29] Andrew B. Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology*, Ashgate Science and Religion Series (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Pub, 2010), 30.
[30] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring,* 10.
[31] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring,* 11.

Eisenberg did her doctoral work in the area of prosocial behavior and co-wrote, with Mussen, one of the first comprehensive books addressing prosocial behavior in children. Her goal in this 1977 publication was to examine the extant research, methodologies, and findings in order to inspire future research in this area.[32] Eisenberg continues to do research and publish on prosociality to date.

No discussion about morality and children can take place without acknowledging the work of Piaget and Kohlberg on the stages of moral reasoning. Eisenberg and Mussen, in a later publication, acknowledge the importance of Piaget and Kohlberg to the field of prosocial research, but point out that their work is confined to determining how children understand morality rather than examining how children make prosocial decisions.

> Yet, in a sense, both deal with a circumscribed domain because the data base consists primarily of children's verbalizations about laws, rules, authority, responsibility, equality, and justice. The prosocial domain (thoughts, concepts, and judgments about issues such as personal sacrifice and conflict between one's own needs and those of others) is relatively neglected in Piaget's or Kohlberg's procedures.[33]

Eisenberg, Mussen, and those who follow demonstrate a keen interest in the mechanisms that actually result in prosocial behavior that comes at a personal cost or sacrifice.

Concurrent with the newfound interest in prosociality in the 1970s came Richard Dawkins' book, *The Selfish Gene*, and the argument that humans evolved and survived by each one acting in his own interest.[34] The debate over whether humans can ever be altruistic, motivated by a concern for the other, or whether they are bound to be egoistic, motivated only by

[32] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring,* 11-12.
[33] Nancy Eisenberg and Paul Henry Mussen, *The Roots of Prosocial Behavior in Children* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 124.
[34] Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, *Prosocial Motives, Emotions, and Behavior: The Better Angels of Our Nature* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 3.

a concern for self, continues today.[35] Batson argues that humans can be altruistic and highlights the connection between empathic concern and altruistic motivation in his empathy-altruism hypothesis.[36] He doesn't claim that empathy is the only source of altruistic motivation but he shows how noticing someone's need and experiencing feelings for that person is a primary source of motivation that can lead to acting on behalf of others.[37]

Within the last twenty years, observes Mayseless, the social sciences have shifted their focus from the selfish to the prosocial. She writes: "Rather than focusing solely on the autonomous, individuated, rational, selfish, and separate human being, they have come to appreciate the connected, interdependent bioemotional and caring facets of human existence."[38] She supports this statement by referencing a long list of authors ranging from Murdock, 1971 to Keltner et al., 2014.[39] In all of these developments, the literature on prosocial behavior began to grow in the social sciences and other disciplines as well.

As interest in adolescent prosociality grew, so did an interest in tracing the effect of religion on adolescent behavior. Many of the studies support the idea that religiosity does enhance prosociality in teens. Tsang, Rowatt, and Shariff recently reviewed the studies on religion and prosociality and concluded, "In summary, research on prosocial motivations and religious orientation has revealed that religion does affect helping, in multiple ways."[40] However, Galen and others have pointed out that many of these studies are correlational at best and that

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[35] Stuart A. Karabenick and Martin L. Maehr, *Motivation and Religion,* Advances in Motivation and Achievement 14 (Amsterdam: Elsevier JAI, 2005), 154. http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=270346.
[36] Batson, *Altruism in Humans,* 11.
[37] Batson, *Altruism in Humans,* 29.
[38] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation,* 335.
[39] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation,* 335.
[40] Jo-Ann Tsang, Wade C. Rowatt, and Azim F. Shariff, "Religion and Prosociality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Prosocial Behavior,* eds. David A. Schroeder and William G. Graziano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 614. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195399813.013.013.

very few exhibit the necessary controls to prove a causal relationship.[41] A significant point for the purpose of this study, is to acknowledge the difficulty of establishing a causal relationship for most antecedents to prosocial behavior, including religious and spiritual influences.[42] However, causality is not necessary to appreciate the value of religious and spiritual influences on prosocial behavior. Rigorous studies that show strong correlations provide valuable data for religious educators who are working each day in close and consistent interaction with their students.

Adolescent behavior in schools has been a concern for many decades now, but much of the early focus was on how to prevent antisocial behavior in students. In 1977, Mussen and Eisenberg were early advocates for increasing the study of adolescent prosocial behavior to better understand the influences and mechanisms by which young people behave prosocially.[43] Writing in 2004, Eisenberg and Morris acknowledge the growing body of adolescent prosocial research but call for more work to be done in the field, particularly in developing smaller practical theories, more research on the influence of peers, and increased attention to mediating processes in moral functioning. They conclude, "Thus, there is much more work to be done if we are to grasp the nature of adolescents' moral thought and behavior and to develop ways to ameliorate deficits in moral development."[44] Most recently, Eisenberg, Eggum, and Spinrad acknowledge the progress of adolescent prosocial research which is now beginning to examine characteristics of schools, neighborhoods, and communities in understanding children's positive

[41] L. W. Galen, "Does Religious Belief Promote Prosociality? A Critical Examination," *Psychological Bulletin* 138, no. 5 (2012): 876. doi:10.1037/a0028251.
[42] Nancy Eisenberg and Amanda Sheffield Morris, "Moral Cognitions and Prosocial Responding in Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, eds. Richard M. Lerner and Laurence D. Steinberg (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 180. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9780471726746.ch6.
[43] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring,* 9.
[44] Eisenberg and Morris, "Moral Cognitions," 180.

development.[45] In a recent two-volume work on prosocial education, Higgins-D'Alessandro acknowledges the recent upsurge in prosocial research in education but calls for methods that go beyond precision measurements to include thick and contextual data.[46] In my review of the literature on adolescent prosocial behavior, I appreciate that there is a solid base of research but, like Higgins-D'Alessandro, I would like to see more qualitative studies. Specifically, I see a current need for research that invites young people to tell their own stories about situations in which they faced decisions to act in loving, compassionate, and caring ways toward their peers who were not part of their friend group. It is my opinion that such a study will provide a valuable and necessary component to the study of adolescent prosociality in a religious context.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that privileges the voices of the adolescent subjects of the research. The goal is to provide a thick description of adolescent prosocial behavior that will lead to practical insights for all who work with teenagers. Within semi-structured interviews, I invited the participants to tell stories about acts of kindness they have done for others outside their friend group. I chose a narrative emphasis in this study to capture more of the complexity that real life decisions entail. As a practical theologian, I approached the methodology in this study with an openness to insights from the lived experience of students, education, neuroscience, social science, and theology. I use constructivism as a tool to critique the theological assumptions in

[45] Nancy Eisenberg, Natalie D. Eggum, and Tracy L. Spinrad, "The Development of Prosocial Behavior," in *The Oxford Handbook of Prosocial Behavior*, eds. David A. Schroeder and William G. Graziano (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 126. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195399813.013.008.
[46] Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro, "The Second Side of Education: Prosocial Development," in *Handbook of Prosocial Education*, eds. Philip Brown, Michael W. Corrigan, and Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 11-12.

my own tradition and Christian education in general, but I leave space for the divine to be present in the lives of the participants and in the practical suggestions for communities of faith. I choose to hold the different disciplines in a creative tension to look for insights that will ultimately benefit the adolescents in our faith communities.

I chose to recruit participants from Christian secondary schools in the area surrounding my school. This region is known as the Inland Empire and includes the metropolitan areas of Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ontario in Southern California.[47] Eight of the 11 schools I approached granted me permission to visit their religion classes to invite students in grades 10-12 to participate in the interviews. The schools included both Catholic and Protestant private schools. My goal was to interview between 20-30 students and 21 completed their interviews. There were 15 female students and six male students. The invitation was open to all students in grades 10-12 and those who volunteered were fully aware of the subject of the study and of the questions I would be asking. Thus, the sample reflects students who value kindness, felt they had stories to tell about acts of kindness, and were willing to step forward and spend up to 50 minutes talking with me, someone they had only recently met.

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on stories about acts of kindness toward people outside one's friend group. After the storytelling, I asked several questions that invited the participants to define religion and spirituality, to describe the role religion and spirituality played in their decisions to perform acts of kindness, to describe the role they wish religion and spirituality played in their decisions to perform acts of kindness, and to share what they thought were barriers and incentives for their peers to be more kind to each other. I was the only

[47] "Inland Empire Demographics," Business, Education & Jobs in the Inland Empire, accessed July 10, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20200106202209/https://inlandempire.us/inland-empire-demographics/.

interviewer. The interviews took place after school on the campus of the participant in an office or classroom with school staff present or nearby. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them myself. The longest interview was 48 minutes and the shortest interview was 17 minutes. The median interview length was 27 minutes. I asked the students a couple of warm-up questions inviting them to tell me about when they came to their current school and what their social world looks like now. This allowed them to feel more comfortable with me when they began telling stories and talking about acts of kindness.

Reflexivity

As the author of this research, I bring my own lens of interpretation to the topic of prosociality in the context of religious education. I am a white, middle-class man, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian church, who serves as a teacher of religion at Loma Linda Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist high school. I am also an ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist church and have worked with adolescents in a religious context all twenty-nine years of my professional career. I also approach this project as a doctoral student at Claremont School of Theology in the Practical Theology program with an emphasis on Religious Education. Finally, I write as the father of three teenagers. My approach seeks not to justify religious education, although that will always be a temptation, as much as it is to openly and honestly seek more effective ways to do religious education. The discipline of practical theology seeks to draw insight from a variety of sources, especially the people on the ground who are most impacted by decisions made in doctrine, practice, and policy.

My interest in prosocial cross-group behavior began in the fourth grade when I was bullied and found comfort in the love and care of my classroom teacher. When I entered high

school I wasn't popular but neither was I unpopular. However, I made fun of many students who were unpopular and became the very kind of student I had feared and loathed in grade school. My transformation into a teen who was kind to others didn't happen until my junior year in high school but it changed the trajectory of my life. From that time forward my passion to be kind and to inspire kindness in others has energized my work with teens. Now that I have three teenagers in my home I am continuing the prosocial journey with them and my wife and I endeavor to teach, model, encourage, and support each one in their social development.

My positionality is a conversation partner in this study, not only to provide reflexivity, but also as part of the construction of knowledge. Students were open and honest with me in telling their stories and sharing their thoughts on kindness. I must be open and honest in this study about how my experiences shaped the questions, the analysis and selection of data, and the conclusions.

Overview

This study is organized into the following chapters that cover the literature review, methodology, findings, and interpretations. Osmer suggests that studies in practical theology should ask four basic questions: "What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?"[48] In chapter two, the literature review follows Osmer's framework and examines work in education, neuroscience, social science, and theology that are relevant to the study of adolescent prosocial cross-group interactions. Chapter three, on methodology, describes and explains my approach to the research questions as qualitative with semi-structured interviews that privilege stories. My goal is to provide a thick description of the

[48] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2008), 4.

data and to highlight the actual lived experience and voice of the teens who participated in the study. The chapters on the findings showcase the stories and thoughts of the adolescents. The findings follow the general progression of the actual questions I asked in the interviews. Chapter four focuses on the narratives shared by the participants and chapter five focuses on the reflections and comments shared by the participants. These sections also allow me to create dialogue between extant research, theology, and the stories of the participants and the researcher. The final chapter organizes my conclusions into four major themes that emerged from my analysis. The themes are presence, modeling, resources, and education. I use Osmer's four questions to explore each theme and express my conclusions and recommendations. Finally, I suggest five areas for future research in adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. The first suggests further research that uses a participatory action research methodology. The second suggests exploring how teens engage in acts of kindness through social media. The third encourages more interreligious studies of teens and kindness. The fourth suggests further research that examines more in depth how prosocial behavior originates and provides healing and prosocial motivation for teens who suffer peer victimization and social trauma. The last suggestion encourages more qualitative research on teens and kindness, specifically using ethnographic methods and small sample narrative studies.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

Practical theology begins with everyday life and views people as valid texts for theological study and knowing.[49] The challenges that people face in the context of faith and practice become questions for research and the many ways of studying human beings become resources for addressing those questions. My interest in adolescent prosocial behavior comes from my daily work with teens as a religion teacher in a Christian secondary school. By the time my students graduate, I hope they will grow in their ability to perform acts of kindness for others outside their friend group. This research looks to the literature from several different disciplines, as well as to the stories and ideas of young people themselves, to gain insight on how to support and encourage them in their growth. Osmer suggests that studies in practical theology should ask four basic questions: "What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?"[50] This literature review follows Osmer's framework and examines works in education, neuroscience, social science, and theology that are relevant to the study of adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction.

What is going on?

One of the best ways to understand a situation is to ask the people involved what they think is going on. Studies that give teens a voice to identify issues they face, as well as possible solutions to those issues, can reveal crucial insights that lead to effective action. In this section I

[49] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Contributions of Practical Theology," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 7.
[50] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

will look at a number of studies that look at prosocial behavior in general and in a religious context.

What is going on: teens and prosocial behavior

Haag surveyed 2,100 adolescent girls who were attending the American Association of University Women's national Sister to Sister Summits. She asked the girls what they thought were the most important issues they faced and what they wished they could change about their schools. Girls spoke about the need to belong and how the pressure to belong motivated them to do things that weren't good for them. They also spoke about wishing the schools would create more opportunities to develop new friendships and give more support for healthy relationships.[51] Haag cites a program designed by students called "Circle of Friends," in Long Beach, California, which effectively involved 500 students working to make their peers feel included.[52] Haag's research illuminates the need in the adolescent social world for teens to reach out to teens in prosocial ways and their ability to respond to that need.

Teenage guys are sometimes perceived as less concerned about close friendships or belonging than teenage girls. Hutman et al. conducted a qualitative study in which they observed six boys, 16 and 17 years old, who volunteered to participate for ten weeks in a group intervention for career planning. One ongoing activity in the sessions invited the boys to simulate a "career course improvement committee." This study observed video data from the committee interactions over the 10 weeks to look for how adolescent males show relatedness.[53] The research team found that these adolescent males did reach out to each other relationally "through

[51] Pamela Haag and American Association of University Women, *Voices of a Generation: Teenage Girls Report About Their Lives Today* (New York: Marlowe, 2000), 64.
[52] Haag and AAUW, *Voices of a Generation,* 86.
[53] Heidi Hutman et al., "Indicators of Relatedness in Adolescent Male Groups: Toward a Qualitative Description," *The Qualitative Report* 17, no. 15 (2012): 6-8. https://link-gale-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A351608845/AONE?u=upl1179&sid=AONE&xid=43f94103.

co-constructing a light atmosphere in which members feel validated, appreciated, safe, accepted, and part of something that goes beyond themselves."[54] Hutman et al. designed their study to assist those who work with adolescent males in understanding how to recognize and support the efforts of teens to reach out to each other. It would be a mistake to assume that all teens understand and show prosocial behavior in the same way. The researchers also noted that, at the time of their study, there was a particular need for studies looking at how male adolescents show relatedness to other males.[55]

Early in her surveys of prosocial research, Eisenberg declared that most studies did not find differences in prosocial behavior by gender.[56] Surveying prosocial research from 1995-2005, Eisenberg and Morris pointed out that studies were now showing that "moral reasoning and attributions regarding motives for prosocial behavior tend to stabilize or become more other-oriented and higher level with age during the adolescent years and that females tend to express more of such reasoning and attributions that do males."[57] Barry and Wentzel add nuance to the study of gender differences by suggesting that "girls are expected to behave in prosocial ways to a greater extent than are boys."[58] Haag cautions those who would research girls in education to avoid generalizing the gender and missing the many unique differences that may exist among individual students.[59]

Both boys and girls show a capacity and desire for belonging and prosocial relatedness, however, it is not always simple or easy for teens to behave prosocially or develop healthy friendships. Brown, in his work studying adolescent social groups, notes that teens entering high

[54] Hutman et al., "Indicators of Relatedness," 19.
[55] Hutman et al., "Indicators of Relatedness," 4.
[56] Eisenberg, *The Caring Child*, 39.
[57] Eisenberg and Morris, "Moral Cognitions," 160.
[58] Barry and Wentzel, "Friend Influence," 158.
[59] Haag and AAUW, *Voices of a Generation*, 7.

school must make very complex social decisions about how to navigate the new social norms, how to interact with small and large social groups, and how to choose friends. Drawing from a number of studies, he categorizes four types of social groups that include the populars, the unpopulars, the midrangers, and the iconoclasts. Brown argues that the primary motivations for how teens interact with each other depend on achieving their own social goals.[60] Brown's findings over several decades provide important descriptions of the adolescent social landscape, however, the primary motivations he describes are self-serving and there is little discussion of prosocial cross-group interaction. My approach to adolescent prosocial behavior assumes that teens may be influenced by religion and spirituality to perform acts of kindness, but I acknowledge that, even for devout students, their motives may be mixed with self-serving reasons along with other-serving reasons. My interviews with adolescents show a side of them that includes complex social reasoning and a range of motives from self-serving to altruistic.

Situations that involve challenging prosocial cross-group interaction may present mixed motives that are tied to the unique particularities of the context. Pickering did ethnographic research for eight years in the Balkans observing ordinary people trying to rebuild their lives after the civil war. She found that the everyday exchanges between people from different ethnic and religious groups, in which they negotiated small favors and common courtesies, formed "weak links" that led to more beneficial cross-group relationships than any peacebuilding programs implemented by groups outside the local community.[61] Pickering tells one story of a

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[60] B. B. Brown, "Popularity in Peer Group Perspective: The Role of Status in Adolescent Peer Systems," in *Popularity in the Peer System*, eds. A. H. N. Cillessen, D. Schwartz, and L. Mayeux (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 172-74. https://web.archive.org/web/20191202015122/https://prsg.education.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Brown-2011-Pop-in-pg-perspective.pdf.

[61] Paula M. Pickering, *Peacebuilding in the Balkans: The View from the Ground Floor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 166.

teenage girl who organized a youth gathering to discuss community issues but also to meet other young people. Her motives were mixed but the results were successful in contributing to opportunities for peacebuilding and cross-group relationships.[62]

Teens can also demonstrate a sophisticated view of prosocial behavior and, more specifically, kindness. Cotney and Banerjee interviewed six adolescent focus groups to better understand how teens perceive kindness.[63] Their findings suggest that teens believe that kindness should be voluntary, other-oriented, and not motivated by self-interest.[64] There is a quality to kindness that disappears when it is required, forced, or driven by reward. Since teens are fully capable of this perspective on prosocial behavior, any efforts to increase prosocial behavior by such methods should be carefully critiqued. These methods often appear to be the default approach in the home, school, and church when specific strategies to encourage prosocial behavior are absent.

Cotney and Banerjee's study also showed that teens struggle to empathize and be kind to those who they don't know very well or to those with whom they don't get along.[65] My study acknowledges this challenge and seeks to understand what motivates teens who do reach out to those outside their friend group. My study also seeks to fulfill a recommendation for future research made by Cotney and Banerjee. "Future research would benefit from further qualitative investigation into specific kindnesses that young people actually engage with, as understanding does not necessarily reflect capacity to act."[66] My study highlights a number of stories in which

[62] Pickering, *Peacebuilding*, 125.
[63] J. L. Cotney and R. Banerjee, "Adolescents' Conceptualizations of Kindness and Its Links with Well-Being: A Focus Group Study," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 36, no. 2 (2019): 599, doi:10.1177/0265407517738584.
[64] Cotney and Banerjee, "Adolescents' Conceptualizations of Kindness," 611.
[65] Cotney and Banerjee, "Adolescents' Conceptualizations of Kindness," 612.
[66] Cotney and Banerjee, "Adolescents' Conceptualizations of Kindness," 613.

teens do engage in acts of kindness toward peers they do not know very well and, in several cases, do not like.

Adolescents grow physically before our very eyes and we test them on what they are learning academically but we don't always notice how they are developing socially. Blakemore reviews recent research on the adolescent brain and emphasizes that the teenage years are a prolonged period of social growth and development in both neurophysiological and psychological ways. She shows how neuroimaging studies locate the regions of the brain involved in mentalizing, the ability to recognize and think about the mental states of others. "In each case, the mentalising task resulted in the activation of a network of regions including the posterior superior temporal sulcus (pSTS) and the temporo-parietal junction (TPJ), the anterior temporal cortex (ATC) and the dorsal medial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC; Figure 9.1)."[67] She calls these regions the social brain and shows that significant structural changes take place in these areas of the social brain throughout adolescence.[68] Blakemore argues that this understanding of the adolescent social brain represents an important reason for the education of adolescents to intentionally develop strategies that assist in social development. "Perhaps the aims of education for adolescents might change to include abilities that are controlled by the parts of the brain that undergo most change during adolescence. These abilities include internal control, multitasking and planning, and also self-awareness, metacognition and social cognitive skills such as perspective taking and understanding other people's minds."[69] This approach may seem fairly obvious to educators, except that many curricula and classroom management

[67] Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, "Development of the Social Brain in Adolescence," in *Self-Regulation in Adolescence*, eds. Gabriele Oettingen and Peter M. Gollwitzer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 195. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139565790.010.
[68] Blakemore, "Development of the Social Brain," 199.
[69] Blakemore, "Development of the Social Brain," 207-8.

strategies can benefit more by making the actual growth and development of the adolescent brain a higher priority.

Educators can contribute to teen social development by teaching to the social brain, but they also impact teen social development by how they relate to their students. Krane et al. conducted a participatory qualitative study with 17 students in Norway and examined the role of teacher kindness in creating positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in high school. The findings affirm that positive TSRs contribute to the overall well-being of students. The students who participated in the research also emphasized the theme that students actually need teachers to be kind in both academic and interpersonal contexts.[70] The authors cite literature arguing that TSRs can impact student mental health in both positive and negative ways. "Several findings have reported that positive TSRs were associated with positive outcomes, such as reduced depression and improved self-esteem, in students (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003; LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008; Wang et al., 2013). In contrast, negative TSRs could serve as a risk factor for poor mental health in students by decreasing self-esteem and increasing depression (De Wit, Karioja, Rye, & Shain, 2011)."[71] Educators have a significant impact on the social development of their students. The challenge is to be intentional and effective in supporting adolescents in developing prosocial behavior.

The literature I have cited up to this point affirms that belonging and relatedness are important to adolescents. Girls and boys want to connect and, even though their motives may be mixed at times, they do reach out to each other outside their friend groups. Since they are still

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[70] Krane et al., "'You Notice That There Is Something Positive About Going to School': How Teachers' Kindness Can Promote Positive Teacher-Student Relationships in Upper Secondary School," *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 22, no. 4 (2017): 377-78, doi:10.1080/02673843.2016.1202843.
[71] Krane et al., "Teachers' Kindness," 378.

developing in many different ways, there is a need to encourage and support them educationally, relationally, and practically.

What is going on: religious teens and prosocial behavior

Religion and spirituality also provide some of the ways in which teens can be influenced, encouraged, and supported in their prosocial development. This study narrows the research sample down from adolescents in general to those teens who attend a Christian secondary school and specifically looks for how religion and spirituality might influence adolescent prosocial cross-group behavior. Ammerman completed a qualitative study in which she interviewed 95 people to understand how religion and spirituality influenced them to live by the principle of the golden rule. Ammerman recruited ordinary people and collected data through multiple interviews, voice diaries, and photos. She wanted to go beyond survey data and hear the participants describe their lives, tell their stories, and define the salient terms and ideas.[72] Ammerman found that many participants spoke of the influences for their prosocial behavior as coming from spiritual practices across a very broad spectrum and as coming from how they participated in organized religion.[73] Based on her sociological research in this area she argues that religion and spirituality have a definite effect on people's behavior that is worthy of study.

> The notion that religion is bound to disappear has become increasingly untenable. There are far too many spiritually serious, well-educated, economically sophisticated, civically engaged religious people in the world. There is no doubt that the nature and role of religion has changed, but these founding myths of social science have run their course. Rather than assuming that spiritual beliefs are irrational and religious participation is regressive, researchers are now asking whether and under what conditions different sorts of beliefs and spiritual practices have what kinds of effects."[74]

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[72] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3-4.
[73] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 58, 310.
[74] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 5.

I appreciate how Ammerman's narrative interview method allows for patterns of religious influence to emerge while still preserving the particularity of the individuals who participated. My study is limited to 21 participants and only one narrative interview per participant, but I believe my study accomplished a similar descriptive task as adolescents told their stories of prosocial cross-group interaction and the connections to religious and spiritual influences.

Smith and Denton conducted a study on the religious and spiritual lives of teenagers in the United States from 2001 to 2005. The initial research used a random-digit-dial telephone survey of homes with at least one teenager. A parent was surveyed for 30 minutes and the teenager was surveyed for 50 minutes. The follow-up research selected a subsample of 267 teens and interviewed them in person.[75] Smith and Denton advance a tentative description of the kind of religion most of the teens in their surveys and interviews actually practice. They call it "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." The main elements are as follows:

> 1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die.[76]

The authors found that most teens could not really articulate traditional doctrines of Christian faith. They state that the role of religion for most teens is to benefit themselves rather than to inspire them to be faithful to God or loving toward others.

> This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of a sovereign divine, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, etcetera. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally

[75] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6. doi:10.1093/019518095X.001.0001.
[76] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-63.

> about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people.[77]

The sample in this research is large and includes a random selection of teenagers. However, the specific sample in my study represents students who are in a Christian school and who volunteered for the study because they already value performing acts of kindness for people outside their friend groups. Many of them are articulate in describing biblical principles of kindness and in discussing their own acts of kindness. Even though the samples are very different, the findings are important to compare because many youth workers and teachers encounter this wide spectrum, from a biblical commitment to kindness to a moral therapeutic deism, in their classrooms and youth groups.

Smith and Denton acknowledge that their data is correlational and they point out that lived human experience is too complicated to isolate a single causal mechanism for behavior. However, they believe that religious faith and practice do influence teens and one cannot rule out causal effects.[78] Smith and Denton provide a list of ways in which they believe their research shows religion influences teens. "1. Moral directives… 2. Spiritual experiences… 3. Role models… 4. Community and leadership skills… 5. Coping skills… 6. Cultural capital… 7. Social capital… 8. Network closure… 9. Extracommunity links… "[79] My interviews with students on Christian campuses support the findings of Smith and Denton's research, including their observation that teen lives are complex and cannot be reduced to simple stereotypes or definitive lists and theories. These elements reflected by Smith and Denton are part of the larger web of experience that works to influence teens in their choices and behaviors. The challenge for parents, pastors, and religious educators is to enhance how the different elements can work

[77] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163-64.
[78] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 239.
[79] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 246-47.

together for the support and growth of young people. I believe it is important to include the point that teens will benefit from becoming part of the process of understanding these elements and of creating opportunities for themselves and their peers. In this, adults can assist by granting them autonomy and respect alongside our guidance.

Adolescents can demonstrate creative and complex theological reasoning. Baker conducted theological research with three groups of adolescent girls numbering four or five in each group. The data was collected in 90 minute conversations in which all of the participants, including the researcher and one other feminist theologian, shared autobiographical stories and connected them to stories in scripture and the larger cultural context.[80] Baker identifies seven theological assertions from the conversations that come from the adolescent narratives. The two assertions that relate most directly to my study on prosocial behavior are number six, God's incarnation, and number seven, the purpose of the church. "6. God is most fully alive (incarnated) in us when our eyes are open to the pain of others. 7. Church, at its best, is a community of compassion, a resource in our healing, and a potential agent of change in the world."[81] The girls in this study are doing theology in a way that impacts their prosocial behavior.

Adolescents desire connection and belonging and are capable of reaching out to each other in acts of kindness. Many teens who are part of Christian faith communities demonstrate a wide spectrum of religious and spiritual influences that impact their prosocial behavior. Some may see God only as the person they turn to when they are in trouble, but others see God as a consistent and positive presence in the midst of their complex social world.

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[80] Dori Grinenko Baker, "Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk Across Religious Borders," *Religious Education* 95, no. 3 (2000): 324. https://search-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/docview/199356398?accountid=10143.
[81] Baker, "Girlfriend Theology," 327.

Why is this going on?

The interpretive task in this research study is to try to better understand how adolescents actually arrive at decisions regarding prosocial cross-group behavior. Eisenberg and Mussen emphasize that prosocial behavior is so complex that no study can claim to be exhaustive or definitive. Also, no one theory can adequately explain prosocial behavior.[82] Surveys of prosocial research show a growing field that adds new theories and creative methodologies.[83] Rather than frustrating the exploration of prosocial behavior, the rich diversity in research has continued to provide valuable insights into the human quest to treat each other well. I cannot discuss all the theories that inform adolescent development, but I have chosen to briefly discuss the following theories that I believe are relevant to this study: social learning theory, social capital theory, social identity theory, self-determination theory, the self-expansion model, and grounded theory. I also introduce a neuroscientific insight on cognitive resources that can assist teens in setting aside social fears and developing openness toward others. The latter half of this section addresses two concerns with validity in prosocial research and religion. These concerns are correlation versus causation and self-reporting versus experimental framing.

Why is this going on: social learning theory

Social learning theory links prosocial behavior to learned and conditioned responses to modeling and external forces. Mussen and Eisenberg point out how studies of young children show the effectiveness of a punishment and reward system, but they acknowledge that such external motivations do not adequately explain "self-sacrifice, helping, and generosity when

[82] Eisenberg and Mussen, *The Roots of Prosocial Behavior,* 12-13.
[83] Mikulincer and Shaver, "Introduction," 3-10.

these are not followed by any apparent reinforcements."[84] The authors do prefer this theory and argue that even if the motivation begins as external, it can develop into an intrinsic motivation as the child develops her own internal reward and punishment system.[85] Milevsky describes how Bandura and Walters expand this theory to include the power of metacognition and modeling.[86] Teens can critique their own behavior and make modifications through choice and teens can learn by observation without extrinsic motivation. In my study, the participants acknowledge and illustrate each of these elements of the social learning theory. Several participants also discuss the difficulty in trying to transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, especially in the religious context.

Why is this going on: social capital theory

King and Furrow, in their study on the connections between religion and prosociality, utilize social capital theory to understand the impact religious communities and institutions have on youth. They explain how "social capital theory provides a conceptual model for understanding how positive outcomes are mediated in a social context through interpersonal, associational, and cultural social ties."[87] Research on prosocial behavior in a religious education setting benefits from paying particular attention to the social context in this theory. Growing up in a religious community can present problems when the adults are hypocritical, judgmental, or manipulative. On the other hand, growing up in a religious community can present enormous

[84] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring,* 29.
[85] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring,* 29-30.
[86] Avidan Milevsky, *Understanding Adolescents for Helping Professionals* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2014), 38. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/DTL/detail.action?docID=1876342.
[87] Pamela Ebstyne King and James L. Furrow, "Religion as a Resource for Positive Youth Development: Religion, Social Capital, and Moral Outcomes," *Developmental Psychology* 40, no. 5 (2004): 705. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.40.5.703.

benefits when the adults are authentic, caring, and supportive. The teens in my study share stories of how positive social capital helped them develop prosocially.

Why is this going on: social identity theory

Social identity theory, introduced by Tajfel, posits that individuals categorize the groups around them and decide on the personal costs and benefits of identifying with a particular group.[88] The resulting categories of the ingroup and outgroup provide a framework for understanding how and why people might choose to help those close to them and choose not to help those who do not belong to their particular group. Vaughan et al. use this theory to look at the biases children exhibit against helping each other and how sympathy and empathy motivate children to genuinely care for those outside their group.[89] Martin and Wiebe, offering a critique of the current studies linking prosocial behavior and religiosity, argue that religion functions to protect the ingroup from the outgroup. They state that "even though religious beliefs and practices may encourage prosocial behavior with respect to the ingroup they are anything but prosocial with respect to members of out-groups."[90] This critique provides an important reminder for prosocial research in a Christian school to be attentive to interreligious cross-group interactions. This theory also highlights the complexity in trying to determine how people choose to actually show kindness to others when there is no apparent benefit to themselves.

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[88] Rupert Brown and Dora Capozza, "Introduction: Social Identity Theory in Retrospect and Prospect," in *Social Identity Processes: Trends in Theory and Research*, eds. Dora Capozza and Rupert Brown (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 7-8. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=537749.

[89] Julie Vaughan et al., "Testing Aspects of Compassionate Love in a Sample of Indonesian Adolescents," in *The Science of Compassionate Love: Theory, Research, and Applications*, eds. Beverley Anne Fehr, Susan Sprecher, and Lynn G. Underwood (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 407-9. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9781444303070.ch14.

[90] Luther H. Martin and Donald Wiebe, "Pro-and-Assortative-Sociality in the Formation and Maintenance of Religious Groups," *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* 2, no. 1 (2014): 6. doi:10.1558/jcsr.v2i1.1.

Why is this going on: self-determination theory

Mayseless, in her book on caring, applies the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan. This theory argues that competence, relatedness, and autonomy are crucial to an individual's sense of fulfillment and well-being. Mayseless points out how research into caring must take these three aspects into account when seeking to understand how and why people respond in caring or uncaring ways.[91] This theory is particularly relevant to understanding how adolescents develop cross-group prosociality in that it allows for their need to become autonomous and make decisions on their own as well as their need to feel competent to accomplish whatever prosocial act is before them. Self-determination theory also explores the nature of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in a religious context. Ryan, Rigby, and King show how the drive toward autonomy can motivate a person of faith to internalize values that were once externally enforced. However, this process is not easy and many people simply internalize the external forces from their past thus falling short of true autonomous and volitional behavior.[92] Participants in my study illustrate the elements and struggles of this theory in their stories and comments.

Why is this going on: self-expansion model

When people interact with those outside their social group there exists the potential for responses ranging from hostility and conflict to peace and friendship. Brody, et al., in their survey of intergroup relations literature, point out a need for research exploring the prosocial responses to these situations.[93] They highlight Aron and Aron's self-expansion model, which

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[91] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation*, 255.
[92] R. M. Ryan, S. Rigby and K. King. "Two Types of Religious Internalization and Their Relations to Religious Orientations and Mental Health." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65, no. 3 (1993): 586-87. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.65.3.586.
[93] Salena Brody et al., "Compassionate Love for Individuals in Other Social Groups," in *The Science of Compassionate Love: Theory, Research, and Applications*, eds. Beverley Anne Fehr, Susan Sprecher, and Lynn G. Underwood (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 295. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9781444303070.ch10.

explains the motivation for prosocial cross-group interaction as originating in a desire to expand the self through this new relationship. The expansion happens both in the closeness of the relationship and in the goal achievement of including others in a much larger social group. Brody et al. note the model's motivational paradox in that expanding the self is beneficial to the self but including the other is beneficial to the other.[94] Prosocial behavior doesn't necessarily require pure altruism, but the self-expansion model appears to acknowledge the joy one experiences when getting to know people and helping them. Self-expansion can occur at the expense of others, but many of the teens in my study seemed to enjoy including others in their social world in good faith, without selfish intent.

Why is this going on: grounded theory

A good theory can help frame data and inform research and practice. A bad or incorrect theory or even a single theory held inviolable can limit or bias research and negatively impact practice. There is wisdom in attempting to understand and hold in tension a variety of theories in the hope of arriving at more thick and robust findings. One underused approach that I find intriguing for use with adolescents is grounded theory, suggested by Siu, Shek, and Law, in which the subjects of research contribute in a significant way to the formation of a new theory to better understand the phenomena at hand. For example, the authors argue that the current theories used to understand prosocial behavior in adolescents do not adequately address how young people understand and develop the norms that are activated when they behave prosocially.[95] My study does not attempt to develop a brand new theory, however, in light of the

[94] Brody et al., "Compassionate Love," 286-88.
[95] A. M. H. Siu, D. T. L. Shek, and B. Law, "Prosocial Norms As a Positive Youth Development Construct: A Conceptual Review," *The Scientific World Journal* (2012: 832026): 5. doi:10.1100/2012/832026.

many useful existing theories, my methodology seeks to create an informative dialogue between the narrated experiences of adolescents and multiple theories.

Why is this going on: cognitive resources

As adolescents encounter prosocial opportunities, neuroscience reveals a vortex of emotional experiences and triggers stemming from both early events and current social interactions. Cozolino explains how the fear systems in the brain, located in the amygdala and posterior cingulate, slow down and become less active when people think about the ones they love and who love them.[96] In a similar vein, Daugherty suggests that through meditation techniques designed to encourage heartful awareness, people can minimize reactivity and change how they interact with others, becoming more open.[97] Both Cozolino and Daugherty stress the importance of intentional work toward the goal of pausing the brain's highly developed trigger for fear in order to learn to love and reach out to others. Daugherty also points out how oxytocin, the biochemical in the brain that impacts social closeness, can be intentionally cultivated to help generate compassion that goes beyond mere empathy.[98] Not all teens may understand or have these mental and relational resources present in their lives, but this study is attentive to how such attachments and intentional work may be active in teens or how they might be utilized in the multiple contexts of home, school, church, and friend groups.

Why is this going on: correlation versus causation

One critical issue that continues to create debate in the interpretive task of prosocial research, especially in the area of religion and prosociality, is causality versus correlation. In an

[96] Louis J. Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 401.
[97] Alane Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: A Journey of Transformation Through the Science of Embodiment* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2014), chapter 4, Kindle.
[98] Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, chapter 4, Kindle.

article on prosocial behavior in the *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, Eisenberg and Morris acknowledge that "much of the work reviewed in this chapter has been correlational, so few firm conclusions can be drawn in regard to causality."[99] In his own work, Batson critiques Eisenberg's use of correlational data but he stops short of requiring parsimony in prosocial research and argues for a "more complicated and challenging world of multiple prosocial motives."[100] While causality and parsimony are very desirable in experimental studies, the complexity of prosociality in real life situations calls for methods that allow for correlation and multiple motives.

Galen critiques many of the research findings that link religiosity to prosocial behavior as equally attributable to non-religious antecedents and psychological effects.[101] Saroglou, in his book, *Religion, Personality, and Social Behavior*, directly addresses Galen's critique.

> As psychologists, we need to understand for what reasons religious attitudes and behavior influence human behavior. It is thus misleading to confound statistical analyses and psychological understanding and conclude, for instance, that religion has no causal role on human behavior if its power has been fully explained in meditational analyses; or, on the contrary, that religion has "unique" power if its predictiveness remained significant beyond the effects of predictor variables. Opposing religion's causal role with "secular" psychological mechanisms (Galen, 2012) is psychologically rather meaningless (Myers, 2012; Saroglou, 2012b).[102]

Part of the challenge facing all those interested in studying the effects of religion on prosocial behavior is the tendency for social science to be too reductionist in its methods. Hardy and Carlo argue the following:

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[99] Eisenberg and Morris, "Moral Cognitions," 180.
[100] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 209.
[101] Galen, "Does Religious Belief Promote Prosociality?," 876.
[102] Vassilis Saroglou, "Introduction: Studying Religion in Personality and Social Psychology," in *Religion, Personality, and Social Behavior*, ed. Vassilis Saroglou, (Hoboken, NJ: Psychology Press, 2013), 18. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1323297.

> In reality, religion may positively influence youth in ways not reducible to existing sociological or psychological theories, and ways not easily transferable to other socialization agents. Examples of such ways are spiritual experiences and relationships to divine beings. On the other hand, religious and non-religious socialization experiences that jointly promote positive moral values and behaviours may have powerful impact on prosocial development of youth.[103]

Batson and Shaw frame an appeal to look for multiple prosocial motives as a commitment to a more realistic and accurate understanding of the phenomena.[104] The same appeal can be made for opening up the research to allow for multiple agents of causation that include religious and non-religious together rather than one or the other. My research does not seek to prove causation between religion and spirituality and prosocial behavior, but it is important to affirm and establish the value and validity of seeking religious and spiritual influences on prosocial behavior amidst multiple forms of influence.

Why is this going on: self-reporting versus experimental framing

Another method that is contested in providing data for the effect of religiosity on prosocial behavior is self-reporting. Galen critiques the method of self-reporting among religious groups due to findings showing that religious people tend to inflate their concept of their prosocial characteristics beyond what they actually demonstrate. This is also linked to the desire within religious communities for individuals to manage how they look in comparison to the stereotype of good behavior.[105] Galen concludes:

> Taken as a whole, the evidence indicates that religiosity has an effect only on self-reports of prosociality rather than actual behaviors in most contexts. As the standard textbook in the psychology of religion field (Hood et al., 2009) concludes, "There are indications

[103] Hardy and Carlo, "Religiosity and Prosocial Behaviours in Adolescence," 245.
[104] C. Daniel Batson and Laura L. Shaw, "Evidence for Altruism: Toward a Pluralism of Prosocial Motives," *Psychological Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (1991): 107. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1449242.
[105] Galen, "Does Religious Belief Promote Prosociality?," 890.

> that religious people say they are more honest, but the data do not always bear this out for actual behavior in a secular setting" (p. 434).[106]

Mayseless, on the other hand, challenges the general argument against the validity of self-reporting in her review of the many studies on caring that utilize this method of gathering data. She references studies conducted within the framework of the self-determination theory (SDT).

> I would like to underscore here the importance of the caregiver's *subjective experience*. In the hundreds of studies carried out by SDT researchers, the participants' *self-reports* on their reasons and motivations for engaging in a behavior were the key predictors of the different outcomes, which included observations, reports by others, and hard data such as school achievements as well as self-reports. In other words, what matters is what caregivers *feel* and *think* about the reasons for their care. With regard to the main focus of this book, to the extent that caregivers *experience* autonomous volition – as contrasted with being controlled or coerced by external or internal mores – *their care is viewed as reflecting our innate motivation to care*.[107]

Mayseless is supporting her overarching thesis which is that humans are motivated to care, and she concludes that there is both validity in self-reporting and a thicker description and understanding of the caring process. While Batson is less sanguine about self-reporting in his study of altruism, he emphasizes that motivation is more important than consequences since there are so many variables that can alter the ability to follow through with altruistic behavior.[108] Ultimately, we cannot just dismiss the value of self-reporting in religious communities, however, we can be aware of the real temptation for research participants to want to look good for the interviewer.

A concern coming from the experimental side of prosocial research highlights the importance of how participant choices are framed. Declerck and Boone cite the work of

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[106] Galen, "Does Religious Belief Promote Prosociality?," 891.
[107] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation*, 292.
[108] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 211. Batson refers to Lewin's work which focused on goal directed motives rather than behavior.

Kahneman and Tversky showing that the decisions made by subjects in their experiments were influenced by how the choices were framed for them. "The clear message that emerged from their experiments is that when modeling decisions, context matters!"[109] If the ultimate goal in prosocial research is to better understand why and how people behave prosocially, then exceptional care must be given to how theoretical questions and situations are framed for them and it would seem wise to build up a robust body of real life qualitative data to augment and counterbalance the potential sterility and bias of the experimental construct. This observation about the power of framing is one reason why I began the interviews with invitations for students to tell stories about acts of kindness rather than to answer my specific questions about kindness or prosocial behavior. Students had a little more say in how they interpreted and shared their understanding and experience of kindness in real life settings.

My qualitative approach seeks to hear the connections participants make in their stories between religion and spirituality and prosocial cross-group interaction. Causation and pure altruism are not necessary to prove in this study. Allowing adolescents to tell their experiences in their own terms will provide a thicker description for the interpretive task and for the normative task.

What ought to be going on?

The Christian faith tradition exhorts its members to love one another. However, the normative task of translating an abstract principle into the concrete realities of everyday life calls for careful thought and respect for the unique challenges that people face. Volf tells the story of

[109] Carolyn Declerck and Christophe Boone, *Neuroeconomics of Prosocial Behavior: The Compassionate Egoist* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, Academic Press, 2016), 36. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/DTL/detail.action?docID=2190689.

how he had just finished a lecture on how Christians ought to embrace their enemies when Moltmann challenged him with a difficult question. He asked if Volf, a Croatian by birth, could embrace one of the Serbian fighters who were currently committing horrible acts of violence against Croatians. Volf thought carefully, and replied, "No, I cannot – but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to."[110] Volf's subsequent theological work, *Exclusion and Embrace*, honors the very complex and real struggle people face when they try to love others. The theological themes I discuss in this section provide both ideals and insights from life. The teens in my study, touch on these themes with their own mix of idealism and realism. I will discuss prodigal love, logic of abundance, deep hospitality, narratives of reconciliation, incarnational presence, and discipleship.

What ought to be going on: prodigal love

Volf affirms the Apostle Paul's teaching of the one body of Christ but emphasizes that this concept does not dissolve the boundaries of the individual but places her in an interrelated status with others.[111] This allows Volf to explore the complex relationship between the embrace of another and the justice that must also exist in that embrace. However, Volf does not argue for a blind justice which equalizes everything. Rather, he describes a justice that necessarily follows the will to embrace thus allowing love to shape the justice to fit the particular needs of the situation.[112] This concept is highlighted by Volf as the kind of justice God shows both of his sons in the parable of the prodigal.

> The world of fixed rules and stable identities is the world of the older brother. The father destabilizes this world – and draws his older son's anger upon himself. The father's most basic commitment is not to rules and given identities but to his sons whose lives are too complex to be regulated by fixed rules and whose identities are too dynamic to be defined

[110] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 7.
[111] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 48.
[112] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 216-20.

> once and for all. Yet he does not give up the rules and the order. Guided by the indestructible love which makes space in the self for others in their alterity, which invites the others who have transgressed to return, which creates hospitable conditions for their confession, and rejoices over their presence, the father keeps re-configuring the order without destroying it so as to maintain it as an order of embrace rather than exclusion.[113]

Prosocial cross-group interaction among teens can range from smiling at a stranger who is sad to intentionally working to heal deep wounds created by bullying, prejudice, and violence. As teens face some of these immense social challenges, their own complex and dynamic experiences ought to inform their theology, but they also ought to have a theology that creates authentic hope and gives practical wisdom for addressing these social challenges. Adults who work with teens can model God's prodigal love for them and learn from teens what prodigal love looks like in their social worlds.

What ought to be going on: logic of abundance

Moyaert and Jansen explore a theology of interreligious hospitality and suggest that Christians can engage those who believe differently than them through a logic of abundance based on the generosity God has already shown them. "But the sense that God has done more for human beings (logic of abundance) than they deserve also offers them the power to do more than they must (logic of equivalence), and in that way people already work here and now on the hoped for reconciliation."[114] This approach does not downplay the challenge of navigating deep differences and conflicts but creates hope for bridging what might appear as impossible divisions. Moyaert and Jansen write specifically for interreligious contexts but I see their idea of a logic of abundance as a powerful inspiration for prosocial cross-group interaction of any type. Adolescents live in a social world that can appear woefully limited in resources in which

[113] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 165.
[114] Marianne Moyaert and Henry Jansen, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 313. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/DTL/detail.action?docID=668978.

everyone fights for what they can get for themselves. Doing the minimum for others because you have to or to appear like you are a good person is tempting. However, the good news of the gospel points to a God who gives in abundance and who encourages his followers to give of themselves from a place of abundance. This type of generous kindness never runs out and multiplies as it is shared from person to person.

What ought to be going on: deep hospitality

Yong also addresses interreligious relationships through the lens of biblical hospitality. Yong cites Derrida's play on the word host as indicating that, through hospitality, the host is hostage to the visitor.[115] Yong works justice and boundaries into this extreme hospitality by claiming that what is unholy should not overwhelm the other or the self. "Hospitality needs to preserve the alterity of the other in at least two senses: in recognizing the distinctiveness with which the other represents the image of God and in rejecting the attempts of the unholy other to overwhelm and destroy the self."[116] Even as we call young people to engage each other with deep hospitality and kindness, we recognize that justice and balance are part of the daily challenge in any social situation. Yet, in a world where the development of the self is so central, teens can rise to the challenge of truly placing themselves in service to others in genuine hospitality and love.

What ought to be going on: narratives of reconciliation

Rogers worked with a group of teens to explore the concept of biblical reconciliation in the face of a world traumatized by terrorism. Rogers assisted the group in first developing a critical consciousness to identify cultural narratives of violence and retribution. The teens then moved forward to seek "an alternative narrative, one that promotes complexity instead of sound

[115] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 120.
[116] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 123.

bites, justice instead of vengeance, healing instead of enflamed escalation."[117] Out of this quest they wrote a play entitled *Terrorists in Heaven* that imagined this new story. Rogers shows how teens are capable of identifying and understanding the cultural forces that divide social groups while also envisioning new possibilities in cross-group caring and reconciliation.[118] Imagination is a powerful tool for prosocial motivation and behavior.

What ought to be going on: incarnational presence

Listening deeply to young people and being present with them is how Root developed a theology of incarnational presence for youth ministry. Root moved from a traditional church youth ministry setting to a job in which he met with at-risk students at local public schools. He had one hour a week with each student and soon realized there was little if anything he could do to influence their behavior, so he listened to them, played games with them, and was present with them. Over time, the teens gave Root permission to "be with and for them," which meant suffering with them, rejoicing with them, and relating to them instead of preaching to them. He observed positive changes that happened in their lives, not through a traditional strategy of influence, but through an incarnational relationship of transformation.[119]

Root advances his concept of incarnational youth ministry by discussing Bonhoeffer's model of ministry in which incarnational love is shown when the Christian is willing to share the place of others in solidarity. Adults who work with adolescents, according to Root, can both model and support incarnational place-sharing among the teens in their sphere of influence.[120] In contrast, Root critiques those youth ministries that would use a traditional strategy of influence

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[117] Frank Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti: Empowering Teenagers Through Stories* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 105.
[118] Rogers, *Finding God*, 98-123.
[119] Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 15-17.
[120] Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*, 200.

to get close to adolescents for the purpose of getting them to join the youth group or change their lives. Root points out that, even when successful, the strategy of influence can create a subculture where the ingroup is trying to save the outgroup instead of loving them without an agenda.[121] A theology of incarnational place-sharing grows out of the experiences of teens who don't want to be the target of another program but will respond positively to someone willing to be there for them. This theology also speaks to teens who would take on this task of making the social world around them a more caring one.

What ought to be going on: discipleship

One Christian teaching that may motivate teens to establish cross-group friendships is the call for Christian disciples to invite others to become disciples of Jesus. Dean and Foster frame this teaching as one of the reasons early Christians loved everyone equally since all are loved by Christ and called by Christ to be disciples.[122] The mixed history of evangelism takes us back to the importance of Root's emphasis that relational transformation comes through authentic place-sharing and not an evangelism program using a strategy of influence. However, the call to Christian discipleship is a powerful opportunity to exist in one's social world in a new and radically open way. Destro and Pesce discuss the gospel account of how Jesus set up an "interstitial group" which did not respect the social positions and hierarchy of the day. Disciples experienced transformation through face to face encounters with Jesus rather than through membership in social and cultural organizations.[123] Adolescents today both benefit from church and social organizations and critique the very same institutions. The genuine presence of Jesus in

[121] Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*, 65-68.
[122] Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, 125.
[123] Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, "In and Out of the House: Changes in Women's Role from Jesus's Movement to the Early Churches," in *Gospels: Narrative and History*, eds. Mercedes Navarro Puerto, Marinella Perroni, and Amy-Jill Levine (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 301-5. doi:10.2307/j.ctt175x2sz.19.

and through the deep caring of people for each other creates an environment in which positive evangelism and discipleship can take place.

How might we respond?

Research on adolescent prosocial behavior has generated a number of practical findings, several of which I wish to highlight for religious educators in the school context. I will emphasize the importance of increasing social capital in religious communities, I will discuss the need for caring to be modeled more intentionally for teens, I will discuss teaching prosocial behavior, I will discuss the research on religious priming and how it might be used responsibly with adolescents, and I will discuss the importance of empowering teens to become leaders in prosocial cross-group interaction. While there are many other findings of interest and value to religious educators, these are the five areas I wish to highlight for this section in the review.

How might we respond: increase social capital

Research done by King and Furrow shows the foundational importance of providing many different sources of adult support for adolescents. Notable among the findings in their study is the observation that religious belief and practice alone have much less influence on adolescents than the supportive and trusting adult relationships kids experience in religious communities that are intentional about relational ministry.[124] Religious communities create unique opportunities for adults outside the family unit to connect with teens in supportive and mentor roles.

Kidron and Osher cite research showing that positive adult influence on students translates to positive student engagement in school.

[124] King and Furrow, "Religion as a Resource," 709.

> One line of research that supports the universal approach comes from studies of interventions to promote school connectedness – the extent to which students are bonded to the school and feel accepted, respected, included, and supported at their school (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Research shows that school connectedness develops when students consistently receive emotional support from caring adults (Blum & Libbey, 2004). In fact, student perceptions of teacher warmth and supportiveness can accurately predict student engagement (Patrick, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2011).[125]

Traditional pedagogy places an emphasis on knowledge and skills that are mastered by students, however, it takes extra effort and planning to create campus-based opportunities for staff and community adults to interact in sustained and collaborative ways with students. When class sizes are large and covering a lot of content is critical, the moments of collaboration and building trust among students and faculty can fall by the wayside. Recruiting, vetting, and planning for adult members of the community to participate in curricular and extra-curricular relationships with students demands more time and energy than many teachers feel they can afford. However, the religious educator who wishes to promote and enhance prosocial behaviors among her students must prioritize building social capital on campus in creative and sustainable ways.

Cartland, Ruch-Ross, and Henry conducted survey research in five schools. They used a hospitality scale to measure student perceptions of how much social capital they have and how much they share with others. The findings indicated that "adolescents who find more resources at school add to those resources for others."[126] This suggests that adults and teens who create social resources for others at school can motivate other teens to become social resources in their school and larger community.

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[125] Yael Kidron and David Osher, "The History and Direction of Research on Prosocial Education," in *Handbook of Prosocial Education*, eds. Philip Brown, Michael W. Corrigan, and Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 64.
[126] Jenifer Cartland, Holly Ruch-Ross, and David B. Henry, "Feeling at Home in One's School: A First Look at a New Measure," *Adolescence* 38, no. 150 (Summer, 2003): 305, 318. http://search.proquest.com/docview/195943815?accountid=10143.

How might we respond: intentional caring

Clark conducted an ethnographic study in a public school in Southern California as a participant observer. He served as a substitute teacher for a school year. The next year he conducted 17 open-ended conversations to add to the data.[127] Based on his research, Clark believes that most adolescents feel abandoned by the adults in their lives and that they pull away from the adult world into their own subculture in order to survive.[128] According to Clark, teens cluster into small groups because of their strong desire for belonging and safety. Many of them will play along with the roles that adults expect of them or require of them and appear to engage in cross-group interaction. However, Clark calls these social formations "shadow clusters" and argues that they are often false relationships and far from what young people truly desire from their primary clusters.[129] Speaking to adults who work with adolescents, Clark builds his thesis to challenge them to better understand the social dynamics driving teens and to genuinely care for individual teens with consistent acts of concern.

> This study, along with other current research dealing with intervention strategies that have affected the maximum number of young people, reveals that our cultural ethos of bigger, faster, and splashier does not apply to the issues facing contemporary adolescents. They need adults who are aware of the power of small, deliberate, and consistently authentic applications of relational concern, care, and nurture. As men and women who care about what abandonment has done to our young, we have the opportunity to make a significant difference if we but realize that the biggest need every student has is satisfied in an adult who is there for him or her. Our response must begin with an individual student who needs the encouragement and leadership of an adult who genuinely cares.[130]

One of Clark's key insights is to remind us that teens can be prosocially compliant on the outside while not fully trusting the adults who are trying to encourage their prosocial development.

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[127] Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 203.
[128] Clark, *Hurt 2.0,* 39.
[129] Clark, *Hurt 2.0,* 71.
[130] Clark, *Hurt 2.0,* 191.

Crosby and Smith's study on church support and prosocial behavior indicates that a warm and caring church congregation that intentionally involves young people in prosocial activities and collaborative decision making can be equal to or greater than the home in influencing adolescent behavior.[131] Rather than downplaying the influence of the home, this study emphasizes the importance of the church community working in partnership with the home. Many religious educators know that their students benefit in significant ways if the school program is in active partnership with both the home and the church. However, it is not always easy to motivate and activate all three communities to work together. It would appear that these connections also must be a priority for the religious school if it is to maximize the opportunities to build social capital and enhance prosocial behavior among its students.

Mussen and Eisenberg emphasized the importance of the home in fostering prosocial development and behavior in children. Their early assessment of the research on parenting showed that modeling, warmth, discipline that reasons with a child, and engaging children in taking responsibility were all critical to helping children develop prosocially. These elements all needed to work together and their effect was diminished if parts were missing. Forced obedience and lack of warmth were found to create negative effects on children.[132] Recent studies such as the one on parental warmth and hostility and adolescent prosocial behavior by Padilla-Walker, Nielson, and Day, simply confirm and extend our understanding of the value of caring parenting to raising prosocial children.[133] Schools and parents can easily fall into the trap of seeing students

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[131] Robert G. Crosby and Erin I. Smith, "Church Support as a Predictor of Children's Spirituality and Prosocial Behavior," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 43, no. 4 (Winter, 2015): 252. doi:10.1177/009164711504300402.
[132] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring*, 74-100.
[133] Laura M. Padilla-Walker, Matthew G. Nielson, and Randal D. Day, "The Role of Parental Warmth and Hostility on Adolescents' Prosocial Behavior Toward Multiple Targets," *Journal of Family Psychology* 30, no. 3 (2016): 338. doi:10.1037/fam0000157.

as a product with parents as the consumer and the school as the producer. There is much that parents can learn from the school about parenting and much teachers can learn about teaching young people from parents. Together, the school and home can intentionally learn how to increase the overall warmth and caring for young people and how to best influence their prosocial development. This, however, takes a paradigm shift from a product mentality to a collaborative partnership.

How might we respond: teach prosocial behavior

Noddings approaches the subject of education and prosocial behavior from a long history in education both as a practitioner and scholar. She makes several far reaching recommendations from her review of both educational research and philosophy of education. Perhaps her most challenging claim is that all education ought to make caring its top priority.

> Sometimes, a writer acknowledges the supreme importance of both human domains but assigns their nurturance to separate institutions. Thus, the school trains the intelligence, and the home and church train for morality and emotional well-being. We must reject this view emphatically. It is not that these functions cannot be separated theoretically. It is, rather, that the human being who is an integral composite of qualities in several domains is thereby shaped into something less than fully human by the process. The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring.[134]

Noddings explains that the teacher has a unique opportunity to model caring in how he interacts with students. Drawing from Buber's work on how people ought to treat each other as "I/thou" rather than "I/it", Noddings addresses such issues as discipline, grades, and instruction and emphasizes empathy, reasoning, and collaboration over strict adherence to unilateral evaluation and punitive measures.[135] Best practices in education recognize the pedagogical value of

[134] Noddings, *Caring*, 172.
[135] Noddings, *Caring*, 186-201.

collaborative learning and student engagement, but Noddings opens our eyes to the impact of teacher modeling and school culture on the moral development of students.

Within the context of a caring school environment, Noddings also pushes all education to discuss and relate ethical issues to all subject matter. She draws from the work of Dewey in this matter and warns against isolating knowledge from moral obligations.[136] Educators intuitively sense that a brilliant student without a moral compass can create social devastation in her wake. However, it is another challenge of time and effort to appropriately include the discussion of values into curricula. Noddings points out that schools are not accustomed to discussing values for fear of showing bias and for fear of parental objections. Her recommendation is not to shy away from the challenge, but to embrace it and to bring the parents into the dialogue in a caring and collaborative way.[137] This may be a significant paradigm shift for many schools but should be well within the vision of religious education.

A variety of prosocial programs exist for schools and debate exists as to their effectiveness. Vincent and Grove point out that What Works Clearinghouse began a comprehensive study of programs to determine their effectiveness but the progress has been slow. The authors hope future studies will confirm their conclusion from initial studies that character education programs do work. "What we know from historical and contemporary studies is that a hybrid approach that uses both direct and indirect instruction of character education is effective in impacting the character of students as well as in creating a more positive working and learning environment."[138] The authors cite the work of Berkowitz and Bier who

[136] Noddings, *Caring*, 179.
[137] Noddings, *Caring*, 184.
[138] Philip Vincent and Doug Grove, "A Primer on History, Research, and Effective Practices," in *Handbook of Prosocial Education*, eds. Philip Brown, Michael W. Corrigan, and Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro. Lanham (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 132.

reviewed 69 studies and two meta-analyses of over 100 additional studies on character education and offered six conclusions. "1. It does work, if effectively designed and implemented. 2. It varies. 3. It affects much. 4. It lasts. 5. Doing it well matters. 6. Effective program strategies. (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006, p. 6)"[139] Veteran teachers are always wary of new programs that a school rolls out in September only to be forgotten by December. However, schools that intentionally and consistently work at character education see results in their students.

Mayseless suggests teaching four primary themes in caring: "teaching caring skills, imparting caring values, creating a caring community, and broadening the circle of care."[140] She describes an approach for education that uses scaffolding, socialization, and opportunities for caring. She also argues that the teaching of caring must avoid several major pitfalls.

> My main concern relates to the intrinsic and autonomous nature of the caring motivation and to its authenticity. We need to beware of the commodification of care and prosocial acting or of relating to it as merchandise to be sold and marketed. Caring, as a reflection of our spiritual core and self-realization, should be based on an autonomous volition that reflects a self-conscious choice rather than an attempt to please others, to be seen as a good person, or to gain fame and status. It should be a reflection of our inner authentic desire.[141]

Mayseless pushes the pedagogical paradigm past just imparting head knowledge to actually inspiring intrinsic motivation from the heart.

Religious education carries the twofold goal of educating young people for the requirements of the secular world and mentoring them in how to actually live in the world with love, grace, and compassion. Rogers, in his book *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus*, lays out a vision and means for people to learn compassion. He states, "Quite simply, religious traditions are meant to be spiritual paths of transformative love. They are called to be schools of

[139] Noddings, *Caring*, 128.
[140] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation*, 350.
[141] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation*, 351.

compassion."[142] Rogers introduces six dimensions of compassion that create a powerful curriculum for anyone wishing to become a compassionate person. He describes it as taking your own "PULSE," an acronym for the six dimensions. "1. Paying attention (Contemplative awareness)… 2. Understanding empathically (Empathic care)… 3. Loving with connection (All-accepting presence)… 4. Sensing the sacredness (Spiritual expansiveness)… 5. Embodying new life (Desire for flourishing)… 6. Act (Restorative action)"[143] Many adolescents are aware of some of these elements and long to engage others more compassionately, but they lack a more comprehensive view. PULSE provides a kind of foundational understanding of compassion that can be a powerful part of teaching adolescents how to grow their capacity to perform acts of kindness for others.

Rogers also addresses the challenge of being compassionate toward people who seek to hurt and humiliate us. Compassionate reconciliation with people who hurt us includes setting clear boundaries so that abuse does not continue, but Rogers identifies the ability to reach out to those hurtful people with genuine care and compassion as transformational.

> People who perpetrate violence expect to be hated; they expect to be defied or fled from in fear. They do not expect to be loved. Resisting violence with the weapons of compassion has the capacity to touch the humanity in perpetrators' souls. Compassion treats others with dignity even while confronting their violence, hears others with genuine understanding even when they espouse repugnant viewpoints, invites others into right and accountable relationship even when their deeds are egregious, and grieves the suffering of dangerous people even when we are forced to detain and sequester them. For Jesus, these weapons transform hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. These weapons usher in the kin-dom of God.[144]

Teens, in the idealistic zeal to love, also need this balanced understanding of how compassion both confronts injustice and seeks to transform it through love.

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[142] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 10.
[143] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 30-33.
[144] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 124-30.

Gopin writes out of his experience studying peacemaking in troubled areas of the world, and offers practical steps for peacemaking in daily life. He suggests that the primary work of reconciliation and healing takes place inside ourselves.

> Indeed, what goes on between people cannot be separated from what is going on within people. Who we are, deep inside, will determine how well we get along with others, and so, if we want to fix our conflicts, or anyone else's for that matter, we had better get started on ourselves. The deepest causes of most conflicts, I've discovered, are feelings like dishonor and humiliation. Likewise, the deepest causes of healing involve the opposite: feeling honored, feeling valued, finding meaning in community.[145]

Gopin lists eight steps that assist in self-examination and communicating with the person you wish to reconcile with. "The eight steps, which I believe work best when followed in sequential order, ask us to do the following: Be, Feel, Understand, Hear, See, Imagine, Do, and then, Speak."[146] Like Rogers, Gopin's practical steps give those who work with teens important ways to both understand and teach the development of compassion.

How might we respond: responsible religious primes

Studies on the effect of religious priming on prosocial and altruistic behavior provide some interesting findings and some challenging practical applications. Xygalatas et al. reference a number of controlled studies and a recent meta-analysis that link religious primes and prosocial behavior.[147] The finding from their own study supports the idea that religious primes, physical or verbal representations of religious concepts and values, enhance the prosocial behavior of generosity.[148] Malhotra examined the so called "Sunday Effect" among religious people and prosocial behavior in his study. He found that religious people were not more generous than non-

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[145] Marc Gopin, *Healing the Heart of Conflict: 8 Crucial Steps to Making Peace with Yourself and Others* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2005), xiv.
[146] Gopin, *Healing the Heart*, xvii.
[147] Dēmētrēs Xygalatas et al., "Location, Location, Location: Effects of Cross-Religious Primes on Prosocial Behavior," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 26, no. 4 (2016): 305. doi:10.1080/10508619.2015.1097287.
[148] Xygalatas et al., "Location," 312.

religious people during the week but were significantly more generous after attending their Sunday worship service.[149] He acknowledged the limitations of the study, one of which was that it did not assess whether "there are other, non-God-related stimuli that inspire prosocial behaviors among non-religious individuals . . ."[150] Galen also draws attention to the need to better understand the nature of primes in general, especially with non-religious people as subjects included in the study.[151] Cappellen, Saroglou, and Toth-Gauthier revisited the "Sunday Effect" in their study on how attending mass increases the prosocial desire to share. In addition to confirming Malhotra's findings, this new study showed that the social aspect of attending mass in a community increased the emotion of love which increased the desire to share with others.[152]

Primes can be visual, verbal, or social in nature. Primes can be religious or simply a representation of prosocial behavior. The findings on the effects of primes lead religious educators to a challenging question: How can religious education use primes in ways that are appropriate and effective but not manipulative? Many religious educational institutions have weekly chapel services which include the spoken word, music, and art, all of which can function as religious and prosocial primes. Many classrooms include posters and projects that refer to prosocial concepts and ideas, either to prompt classroom behavior or to illustrate curricular goals. Schools often plan events to create school spirit, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of community. Schools can and do utilize primes, but the question arises as to whether students are

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[149] Deepak Malhotra, "(when) are Religious People Nicer? Religious Salience and the 'Sunday Effect' on Pro-Social Behavior," *Judgment and Decision Making* 5, no. 2 (2010): 141. http://journal.sjdm.org/10/10216/jdm10216.pdf.
[150] Malhotra, "Religious People," 141.
[151] Galen, "Does Religious Belief Promote Prosociality?," 889.
[152] Patty Van Cappellen, Vassilis Saroglou, and Maria Toth-Gauthier, "Religiosity and Prosocial Behavior Among Churchgoers: Exploring Underlying Mechanisms," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 26, no. 1 (January 2016): 19. doi:10.1080/10508619.2014.958004.

included in the process of determining which values should be emphasized and how the primes should be activated. Prosociality contains within it the concept of personal decision making and responsibility so mere reactions to primes determined by others seems to betray the ultimate intention of promoting prosocial development in adolescents. However, if students can be included in the process of determining the primes and how to use and evaluate them, then perhaps the power of primes can be productive in a positive way.

How might we respond: empower teens to become leaders in prosocial cross-group interaction

Secondary education can, without careful thought and planning, treat students as mere receptacles of information rather than co-creators of knowledge and learning. Telling teens how to be kind to one another is one thing, empowering them to explore and experiment with ways to learn and inspire each other to perform acts of kindness toward those outside their friend groups is a much bigger commitment. One such endeavor to empower teens in cross-group interaction took place in the context of interreligious dialogue and learning. Kujawa-Holbrook mentions a number of programs that seek to involve youth in interreligious learning activities. She specifically cites the Interfaith Action Youth Leadership Program which started as a program to teach young people about other religions but evolved to the point where teens create and implement events that foster interreligious cross-group friendships and shared community initiatives.[153] Empowering young people to create and lead out in cross-group initiatives involves both training them and granting them an appropriate level of autonomy. They must have permission to experiment and possibly fail in order for their successes to be shared and owned by adolescents rather than adults.

[153] Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning among Faith Communities* Horizons in Religious Education 1 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 66-68.

Kujawa-Holbrook addresses the importance of a community intentionally developing cultural competency in order to better engage in interreligious learning and cross-group interaction. "Cultural competence is a learned skill, not an automatic gain from most religious education. Studies have shown that culturally-competent faith communities are not organic; that is, without intentional skill-building, most instinctively attract persons like the dominant group."[154] I believe the principle applies equally to performing acts of kindness for people outside one's circle of friends. Adolescents, like adults, can simply gravitate toward those most like themselves and miss opportunities to reach out to others who are not like themselves. Religious communities who prioritize cross-group friendship and acts of kindness and involve teens in planning and running the initiatives will powerfully impact both the community and the lives of its young people.

How might we respond: future research

Many of the studies I have read in the area of adolescent prosociality call for future research that is qualitative. The need is for thicker descriptions of the mechanisms by which students are motivated, make decisions, and perform prosocial acts. Qualitative data can reflect more of the nuances of prosociality as well as begin to chart how adolescents understand their own experiences in terms of religiosity, spirituality, and prosocial behavior. This dissertation is a step forward to provide a thick description of the religious and spiritual influences on adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. My interest going forward from this research project is to develop a participatory action research project that incorporates adolescents in the formation and utilization of the research. If we want young people to be kind to each other we must empower

[154] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders,* xxxv.

them to care about kindness and this means that the research must belong to them and not the adults who wish to study them.

Durand and Lykes lay out an appeal for participatory action research (PAR) because it signals to students that their voice is critical to the efforts made toward enhancing their well-being and prosociality.[155] The PAR methodology arose out of a need for marginalized groups to critique the cultural status quo and power base and to formulate and own their own methods of gathering knowledge and making decisions that affect their community. In this regard, many teens feel that adults make all the decisions for them without consulting them or allowing them to contribute in meaningful ways to the community, whether that be at home, school, or church. This approach seeks to invite engagement and ownership by youth and empower them to care.

[155] Tina M. Durand and M. Brinton Lykes, "Think Globally, Act Locally: A Global Perspective on Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development," in *Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development: Strategies for Closing the Gap between Beliefs and Behaviors,* eds. E. Gil Clary and Jean E. Rhodes (New York: Springer, 2006), 249.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

As a religious educator who works with adolescents in a private Christian high school, I appreciate research that assists me in better understanding, encouraging, and supporting my students in developing prosocial behavior toward their friends and others outside their social groups. Students who attend Christian secondary schools experience many different factors that may influence their prosocial behavior to varying degrees. This study specifically examined religious and spiritual influences in adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. The purpose of this research is to provide qualitative data and analysis that will inform Christian school communities as they seek to nurture students in their growth as compassionate and caring young people.

This study asked the following questions: What are the religious and spiritual influences that motivate adolescents to behave prosocially toward their peers who are outside their social groups? How do those influences operate in the complex and dynamic social world of adolescence? What can we learn about cross-group interactions from the stories of students who walk the halls of Christian high schools? In order to best answer these questions, I chose to do a qualitative study with a narrative emphasis in an interpretive framework of practical theology.

As a practical theologian in the Christian tradition, my research attempts to open up views of faith and practice informed by the lived experiences of teenagers. The structure of this research project follows Osmer's suggested approach for practical theology which outlines four tasks with their corresponding questions: The descriptive-empirical task asks, "What is going on?"; the interpretive task asks, "Why is this going on?"; the normative task asks, "What ought

to be going on?"; and the pragmatic task asks, "How might we respond?"[156] The descriptive work in this study privileges the experiences and voices of adolescents as they tell their stories about prosocial cross-group interaction. In the interpretive task I use constructivism as a tool to challenge prior theological assumptions about adolescents and religious education and behavior. However, my framework retains the space for God to be present and active in the lives of the participants and in the normative work of theology. In the normative task I create a dialogue among prosocial theories, selected theological and biblical works, and the specific insights from the living texts of the participant interviews – all of which seeks to inform faith and practice in adolescent cross-group prosociality. The pragmatic work looks for how religious educational leaders, youth ministry leaders, parents, and teens can shape practical responses that encourage and support prosocial cross-group interaction. My own experiences as an adolescent, as a religion teacher in Christian schools, and as a parent of three teenagers, positions me in this study. My interactions with the students in the interviews also provide part of the construction of knowledge and understanding about prosocial cross-group interactions.[157]

This chapter is divided into several sections addressing Research Design, Methodology, Reflexivity, Population, Data Collection, Researcher Ethics, Data Analysis, and Limitations and Delimitations.

Research Design

Eisenberg and Mussen, in their second work on prosocial behavior in children, point out that the topic is so complex that no study can embrace all of the antecedents to prosocial

[156] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.
[157] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches,* 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2013), 24-25.

behavior. Likewise, they argue that no single theory can encompass the entire scope of prosocial behavior.[158] Surveys of the current research in prosocial behavior, such as the one provided by Mikulincer and Shaver, show that the body of research has grown over the past thirty years, as have the salient theories and methodologies.[159] Rather than frustrating the exploration of prosocial behavior, I find that the rich diversity in research has provided valuable insights into the human quest to treat each other well.

Many studies in education and social science place a high value on research that can control for variables and isolate causal relationships that can be replicated. However, much as a single theory cannot do justice to the complexity of prosociality, so too, a single preferred methodology would limit our ability to understand prosocial behavior in adolescents. Research on prosocial behavior has made use of many different methods ranging from observation in lab experiments to self-reporting questionnaires and statistical analysis. In my survey of studies in prosocial behavior, qualitative research is often part of the recommendations for future research that authors believe would greatly enhance the knowledge on the subject. Many of the conclusions offered at the end of quantitative studies naturally lead to questions that are best answered qualitatively. More specifically, there appear to be very few studies that give adolescents the opportunity to tell stories and the freedom to think creatively about how religion and spirituality play a role in motivating them to be kind to teens outside their friend groups. Certain questions that require qualitative research also require the adolescent contribution and voice to both the question and the decisions made from the findings.

The qualitative approach of this study aims to address these questions in the context of lived experience and to give voice to adolescents in contributing to a study of their social world.

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[158] Eisenberg and Mussen, *The Roots of Prosocial Behavior,* 12-13.
[159] Mikulincer and Shaver, "Introduction," 3-10.

The findings create a dialogue between existing research and theory and the unique experiences and stories of the participants and the researcher. This data seeks to contribute a window by which those who work with adolescents can see a thick description of teen prosociality. The purpose is to lead to practical and concrete insights for encouraging and supporting adolescents in their development of prosocial behavior and cross-group acts of kindness.

Methodology

As valuable as theories and abstract principles are to understanding prosocial behavior, we live our lives as narratives.[160] Ammerman makes a case for a narrative approach to the study of religion and specifically for listening to the stories people tell about their daily lives. "If stories, large and small, are the mechanism through which the world is socially constructed, we can learn a great deal about the social shape of religion by listening for how everyday stories are told."[161] I chose a narrative emphasis for this study because I wanted to capture more of the complexity and nuance of the teen world through stories.

If we can use narrative to better understand the role of religion in people's lives, we can also see how narrative is a more powerful way for people to frame their moral values and choices than abstract principles. Hauerwas and Burrell point out the following relationship between the abstract and narrative context. "So we are given the impression that moral principles offer the actual ground for conduct, while in fact they present abstractions whose significance continues to depend on original narrative context."[162] Rather than trying to ask students to talk about

[160] Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 175.
[161] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 10.
[162] Hauerwas and Burrell, "From System to Story," 175.

prosociality in terms of moral principles, I chose to start with stories that they believed showed prosociality in action and in context. Ammerman's study, while looking for how faith influences everyday living, began by asking participants to tell a story about an important decision in their lives and listened for how faith was mentioned. "Rather than asking them how much their faith influences their lives, we asked them to tell us about a time when they made an important decision, and we simply listened for whether and how faith was invoked."[163] I chose to emulate this approach in order to let the participant tell the story and organically let religion and spirituality become part of the original story. I did complete the interview with more specific questions about the role of religion and spirituality in their decision to be kind to someone else, but the initial story shows some of the primary shaping of their view.

In addition to storytelling, the interview was semi-structured and included follow-up questions and specific questions that encouraged participants to discuss prosocial cross-group interaction in ways that identified religious and moral values. Hauerwas acknowledges the need for both principles and story in the moral life.

> Even though moral principles are not sufficient in themselves for our moral existence, neither are stories sufficient if they do not generate principles that are morally significant. Principles without stories are subject to perverse interpretation (i.e., they can be used in immoral stories), but stories without principles will have no way of concretely specifying the actions and practices consistent with the general orientation expressed by the story.[164]

Students in this study demonstrated their knowledge of religious and spiritual influences and moral values and principles in both their stories and their commentary throughout the interviews.

My narrative approach stops short of an in-depth narrative study with only one or two participants. However, this strategy allowed me to prioritize the contextual stories of adolescents

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[163] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 14.

[164] Stanley Hauerwas, John Berkman, and Michael G. Cartwright, *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 170. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1215/9780822380368.

in a conversation between prosocial theory, extant studies, and practical theology. In the scope of this study, there exists a tension between the depth that can be achieved in a much smaller sample and the breadth that comes from larger samples. I appreciated the rich data I was able to gather from the 21 volunteers in my study but I also recommend more studies that take a smaller sample of only several students and develop a more extensive narrative analysis over time.

As a practical theologian, I approached this study by intentionally privileging the lived experience of the adolescents who are the subjects of the research and the recipients of the type of decisions made by the adults in their world. I chose to make use of a constructivist philosophy to challenge my own predefined notions of how teenagers should think and behave. This approach also pushed me to problematize the theological and cultural assumptions that accompany religious education and youth ministry in the church. Lincoln and Guba posit that constructivism emphasizes the relationships between the individual and the context.

> "The purpose of this treatise is to propose a systematic way – which we call constructivism – of answering the four basic questions that start with the presupposition that social reality is relative to the individuals involved and to the particular context in which they find themselves. Change the individuals and you change the reality. Or change the context and you change the reality. Or change both the individuals and the context and thoroughly change the reality. And if you make that ontological redefinition, obviously you greatly alter the presuppositions it is reasonable to make at the epistemological and methodological, as well as the axiological, levels.[165]

This approach to reality may challenge religious educators like me, who work in faith communities more comfortable with traditional understandings of reality that derive from a belief in an absolute divine being and a divinely inspired sacred text. I see this approach as necessary, however, to give a voice to teens who are often stereotyped by society and the members of their faith community.

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[165] Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *The Constructivist Credo* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013), 39. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/DTL/detail.action?docID=1187038.

The use of constructivism is not all encompassing in this study. Lincoln and Guba discuss their own use of constructivism by framing it as a tool. "I prefer, as a constructivist, to think of a construction as little more than a metaphor, not for something 'real,' but as a way of making sense of something."[166] Rather than approaching adolescent prosocial behavior and religious and spiritual influences as a set reality that teens must conform to, I have chosen to see the interviews as ways to construct meaning that will help all of us, teens and adults, make better sense of what their social world, decision making, and behavior is actually like for them. The progression to determine values and practices will hopefully be more reflective of the adolescent world and contain their wisdom and their voice.

Since practical theology looks to include many disciplines as sources of knowledge, differences in philosophy and methodology can present challenges. The intent of this study is to juxtapose the various approaches and place them in dialogue with each other. Capps discusses different approaches to pastoral theological methodology that place theology and psychology in three different relational models: convergence, juxtaposition, or structural uniformity. He describes the juxtaposition model in light of Arnheim's art composition models and Niebuhr's Christ and Culture models.

> Similarly, the juxtaposition (Arnheim) and dualism (Niebuhr) models have much in common because in both the theological and psychological are simply juxtaposed and do not move toward a common destination. But the juxtaposition model adds the possibility that the theological and psychological resources may be joined by other resources derived from other fields or disciplines. This, in itself, is a complicating factor, but it may be one that enriches the meaning and significance of the object of study.[167]

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[166] Lincoln and Guba, *The Constructivist Credo*, 29.

[167] Donald Capps, "Method, Models, and Scholarly Types: Reflections on Thesis and Dissertation Writing in Pastoral Theology," *Pastoral Psychology* 63, no. 5-6 (12, 2014): 556. doi:10.1007/s11089-014-0594-4.

Swinton and Mowat discuss a similar framework called "mutual critical correlation." They identify the challenge – achieving true mutuality between theology and science – experienced by faith traditions which prioritize theological work as reflecting the word of God. However, they also acknowledge the fallibility of human effort in theological work and emphasize the need to use other resources to critique the theological work. Ultimately, Swinton and Mowat privilege the theological work but invite the critical work from the other disciplines that enrich Practical Theology.[168] My position as a religious educator in a conservative part of the Christian faith tradition places me initially in favor of Swinton and Mowat's framework. However, I also see how the conservative religious community I serve has at times ignored the wisdom and experience of its members in favor of the institutional version of God's word. Therefore, I continue to seek a stronger critique of my current assumptions about the role of religion and spirituality in adolescent lives as part of my attempt to be more faithful to my understanding of the work of God in my community.

My approach to this study seeks to identify and better understand religious and spiritual influences in adolescent prosocial behavior. Debate continues in prosocial research literature about whether religion is a positive, negative, or non-existent influence. Ammerman, speaking out of her research and experience as a sociologist of religion, argues that the study of religious belief and practice has an important place in understanding the motivation and actions of human beings.[169] Saroglou points out that both religious attitudes and psychological mechanisms can exist in motivating human behavior and it is important for researchers to try to understand the roles of each rather than set them up as mutually exclusive.[170]

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[168] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 89-90.
[169] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 5.
[170] Saroglou, "Introduction," 18.

I proceeded in my study with an assumption that religious and spiritual influences exist in prosocial behavior, but my goal was not to prove that they are better than secular influences nor to show that Christian students will somehow outperform their non-Christian peers in prosocial behavior. The interview framework allowed students to tell stories about cross-group acts of kindness and to choose whether or not to mention religious or spiritual influences. Several students discussed how religion and spirituality are not factors at all in their decisions to be kind. Students were also invited to tell stories of when they could not or chose not to do an act of kindness, opening up the potential for negative case analysis. Students also were able to describe how their religious and spiritual identity changed over time adding complexity to how religion and spirituality actually function in the minds of the students themselves. As religious educators, we often have students in our classrooms that represent a diverse population that include students from other faith traditions, non-religious students, and students who are wrestling with their own religious identity and spiritual experience. Teachers who are student-centered seek to know their students and encourage their learning and growth using all the best tools that will assist them.

Reflexivity

One key element in qualitative research that helps make a study more transparent is researcher reflexivity. Creswell pushes the task of reflexivity beyond simply describing the researcher's positionality to actually discussing how one's position may impact analysis. "The researcher first talks about his or her experiences with the phenomenon being explored. This involves relaying past experiences through work, schooling, family dynamics, and so forth. The second part is to discuss how these past experiences shape the researcher's interpretation of the

phenomenon."[171] My interest in cross-group prosocial behavior began with my social experiences in the fourth grade and my passion for encouraging cross-group acts of kindness and friendship has been a central part of my personal and professional journey. I will describe salient parts of that journey in the following section but I have also added my positionality as a conversation partner throughout this study, including my analyses, conclusions, and recommendations.

When I was nine years old I started the fourth grade in a new school. I had no friends. I couldn't play kickball. Over time I became friends with a couple students, but we were the outcasts, teased and bullied by the cool kids, ignored by most of the other students in our grade. By the time I entered the ninth grade, in the same Christian school, I wasn't an outcast any more. But I wasn't a cool kid, either. I made fun of students who had less social status than me in an immature attempt to increase my own popularity and feel good about myself. Then, as I entered the eleventh grade, my attitudes and behavior changed. I started being nice to most of the students around me, especially the new students and the outcasts. There were several catalysts in my social transformation. First, I grew up a lot during my sophomore year. As I developed a degree of confidence in myself, I realized I had something to offer others. Second, my friends began to recognize this confidence and show appreciation to me for what I was able to provide for them. That affirmation was like a switch that turned on my motivation to continue to be kind and thoughtful to my friends. Finally, as I settled into a more confident and secure social place, I remembered how I felt as an outcast and a new student and I found inspiration in reaching out to others so that their social experience in high school could be better. Throughout my career in church-based youth ministry and church school-based religious education I have continued to

[171] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 216.

prioritize finding ways to encourage adolescents to be kind to each other, especially to those teens on the social margins.

In answering my own interview questions about my motivation for acts of kindness, I would talk about several adults in my life who were catalysts for my growth into a teen who was kind to others outside his friend group. My fourth grade teacher was like a mother to all of us in her class, but she intentionally reached out to me when she noticed how I was excluded by other kids. She showed me kindness and gave me a safe place to rest when I ran off the playground crying. She also noticed me and gave my concerns and my life significance even when many of my classmates were ignoring me. This anchor gave me just enough to make it through that difficult year and begin to grow into a more socially able and connected child.

My mother and father, though very different in their personalities, both showed me the value of being kind to others. My mother in a quiet and behind the scenes way. My father as a gregarious and fun loving conversationalist who went out of his way to meet people, make them laugh and feel included, whether it was in the congregation he led as a pastor, or the line we were standing in for a ride at Disneyland! In addition to modeling kindness, my parents provided me with warmth, affirmation, valuable guidance, and constant support through my teenage years and continue to do so into the present day. Their positive parenting was also a key factor in my prosocial development.

As I talked with my own children about my research, my oldest gave me permission to share her story as part of my positionality. She experienced social exclusion in sixth grade and yet, has become one of the most kind and caring teens I know. She intentionally reaches out to new students and teens who are alone in her school and church youth group. Last year she and a friend developed several ways in which they could try and reach out to other students that they

didn't know very well in an attempt to brighten their day and show kindness and friendship. I am very proud of the journey my daughter has taken from an incident that threatened her social identity and confidence to becoming one who seeks to help others who might be in a similar situation. Her prosocial decisions were her own but she has specifically thanked her mother and me for the values we have prioritized in our home. As a parent, I realize that we work best with modeling and influence rather than control or verbal instruction. I also realize that no parent can be the perfect model. Adolescents develop their autonomy and competence in life with and without direct influence from parents, and sometimes in spite of their parents.

My religious tradition is Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) which identifies with the Protestant tradition in Christianity. Within the SDA history there exists a variety of identities ranging from sectarian elements to groups more aligned with mainstream Christianity. As I approached one of the schools to request to do research on their campus, one of their religion teachers shared that one of his colleagues saw the SDA church as a cult but that he did not see it that way. My initial reaction was to feel defensive about being stereotyped, but I was reminded that while my research sample strives to be diverse within the Christian tradition, such diversity must be treated with extra respect for the unique particularities of each student, regardless of their school or religious tradition. My own religious journey within my tradition charts a general trajectory from a more conservative position to a more liberal position. My decision to attend a graduate school with religious diversity rather than an SDA school has been part of my attempt to broaden my understanding and experience as a religious person and as a religious educator.

I chose not to do research with my own students at my school. Given that the interview was a one-time event, the temptation, however slight, to impress one's teacher might be a bit much for my school population. On the other hand, doing research at schools in regional

proximity to my own school gave rise to several items to note, none of which seemed to be a factor as the research progressed. One administrator expressed concern that my research might in some way be used to give my school an advantage over his school since we share the same student market. I gave my assurances that this was not the intent and that I would take extra care to keep the schools confidential and not use the information to compare them. Most of the schools I visited in the recruitment phase compete against my school in league sports. As I presented to each religion class about my research I joked about this competitive sports relationship and thanked everyone for not holding my affiliation with my school against me. It lightened the mood and the subject did not come up at all in any of the interviews. My own competitive feelings as a parent of three teenagers who play these schools in sports were important to identify. Part of my process going into recruitment and interviews was similar to how I prepare for class: each student deserves my respect and attention at that moment because they are my student regardless of prior behavior or current performance. This professional discipline is not always easy but it is vital to teaching and I found it useful as a researcher. I was prepared, if the situation arose, to terminate or discard an interview if I felt I knew the student too well or had difficulty maintaining a professional stance toward the student.

As a former school administrator, vice principal for one year, and principal for six years, I had to process two related biases during recruitment and data gathering. First, I know how easy it is for school administrators to ignore requests for research. I appreciated the prompt response and clear support I received from several administrators. I did not like how several schools seemed to drag their feet. At first I wondered if I should proceed since I did not want to do research in a hostile environment. But I also realized that administrators are busy and researchers coming in from the outside must be thoroughly vetted for the protection of students. While

several schools responded more slowly, ultimately they were supportive. Second, I also had to set aside my memories of how it feels to work in a competitive private school market and I had to choose to see each school as a partner in religious education and each administrator as a colleague and not a competitor. As I came onto each campus for both the recruitment of participants and interviews I appreciated the support and warmth I received from both administrators and support staff.

Population

As a religious educator I chose to do my research with adolescents who attend Christian high schools. I chose to do this study in the vicinity of where I live, work, and study. This was, in a part, due to logistical feasibility but also because the students and schools who participated represent the rich and complex culture of my home region, the Inland Empire (IE). Each school has its own unique culture and program and each student brings her own unique experience to the data. Out of this particularity I hope to provide insights that can be used in a variety of ways by those who work with teens in many different capacities, but especially in religious education settings.

I chose to gather a certain amount of background data on each school as a prospective parent might, by looking at the website and a common private school review website. I looked for what was easy to find and ascertain. I chose not to interview administrators about their schools because I didn't want them to feel like I was going to review or evaluate their schools as part of the research. One principal was somewhat concerned as to whether I might use any of the data to compare schools but the data is primarily to create a general impression about Christian education in this region. The information I gleaned is only to shed light on student interviews in

a broad sense. Thus the information I present does not name the schools but rather gives ranges and themes that I found to be relevant.

The IE is a region to the East of Los Angeles that includes the metropolitan areas of Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ontario.[172] The overall population for this region is 4,468,841.[173] I approached eleven Christian schools and asked for permission to do research with their secondary level students. My process included a visit to as many of each school's religion classes as possible. I briefly described the research project and the interview process to approximately 1,500 students. Out of this number, 23 returned the consent form and 21 scheduled and completed an interview. Two students completed the consent forms but never returned my emails or texts requesting to schedule an interview.

I expected more students to volunteer and hoped to balance gender and avoid a large majority of only one ethnicity. Since I was working toward a sample size between 20-30 students, I took all who volunteered and I was not able to be selective at all. The sample included 15 female students and six male students. I did not specifically ask any volunteer about their ethnicity. From comments the students made about their own homes or their own cultures it appeared that there were a minimum of two students from four different ethnicities. Eisenberg and Morris point out that adolescent females tend to show more attributes of prosocial behavior than adolescent males.[174] This may have been a factor in why more females volunteered than males.

I did not ask any questions regarding the students' socio-economic status. Several shared how the choice to attend a private Christian school involved financial aid, either from the school

[172] Business, Education & Jobs. "Inland Empire Demographics."
[173] "Inland Empire Demographics," Point 2 Homes, accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/CA/Inland-Empire-Demographics.html.
[174] Eisenberg and Morris, "Moral Cognitions," 160.

or from family members. In the IE the average household income is $20,192.72 and the median household income is $54,943.00.[175] The range of yearly tuition for the eight private Christian schools represented in my research is from $6,750 to $12,144 for secondary education.[176] Even with an annual household income around $50,000 many families in the IE cannot afford Christian education, especially if they have several children they wish to enroll. Tuition aid is an option at most of the participating schools, but for some students and their families, Christian education is a deliberate choice and often involves financial sacrifices.

Since not all private schools welcome researchers on to their campus to interview students, I was happy to find eight campuses willing to assist me in my study. The religious affiliations for these schools are as follows: three Seventh-day Adventist, two Roman Catholic, one Presbyterian, one Pentecostal, and one Evangelical.[177] I did not have a specific balance I was aiming for but I was pleased to have a school sample that represented both Catholic and Protestant traditions. Each of these schools welcomes students regardless of what denomination they belong to. Several participants shared their own religious views as either non-religious or marginally religious.

School sizes ranged from 530 to 80 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Two schools were 500+; two schools were 400+; one school was 200+; and three schools were 100+/-. Many of the campuses also had elementary and middle schools within the grounds. Others had feeder schools affiliated with the faith tradition. The Private School Review website provided information on the percentage of students of color on each campus. The range was quite wide starting at 78%

[175] Point 2 Homes, "Inland Empire Demographics."
[176] Data taken from each of the participating school websites. Two schools did not publish their rates online.
[177] Data taken from each of the participating school websites.

and going down to 17%. One school had 78%; three schools had 50-60%; one school had 42%; two schools had 30-40%; and one school had 17%.[178]

All of the schools clearly expressed Christian mission statements on their websites. Each school also articulated specific goals for educating students to reach out to others in compassion and service. Prosocial concepts and behaviors mentioned on the school websites include the following: responsible citizens, compassion, service, engaging local community, volunteerism, social justice, helping the less fortunate, contribute to society, advance God's kingdom, inclusive atmosphere, family atmosphere, love, restoration of relationships, and the golden rule.[179] Mission statements and schoolwide learning outcomes (SLOs) vary in their overall impact on school culture and curriculum, however, for private Christian schools, accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is vital to operation, and the process always includes stakeholder collaboration in review of mission statements, SLOs, and campus culture. Each school that I included in my study is WASC accredited and therefore has spent some time in review and implementation of their goals.

Data Collection/Interviews

I conducted interviews in this study and invited participants to tell stories about prosocial cross-group interaction. I asked several semi-structured interview questions and asked follow-up questions to the narratives to pursue possible religious and spiritual influences. There are a number of relevant theories and studies that are reference points for the emerging data but the goal was not to prove any one theory or confirm a particular study. This approach shares some

[178] "Welcome to Private School Review," Private School Review, accessed July 10, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20200107180738/https://www.privateschoolreview.com/. Data taken from each of the participating school reviews.
[179] Data taken from each of the participating school websites.

elements of grounded theory in that it begins inductively, seeks to include the voices of those being studied, and approaches the situation by asking "what is going on here?"[180] However, I did not anticipate fully developing a new theory. Existing theories and studies were conversation partners for the emerging data from the narrative interviews.

The basic flow of the interview guide and questions allowed for students to create the narrative and interpretation for their prosocial behavior, but it also allows for Osmer's four tasks of practical theology to engage the text offered by the participants. My initial warm-up questions gave each student a chance to describe their social world, both as they entered their school as a new student and what their social world looks like now. As students told stories about their prosocial behavior each narrative was full of descriptive data and interpretive data as their stories included some of their reasoning and motivation for their actions. Within the narratives, students often provided statements or clues to their normative values. My semi-structured questions encouraged students to talk specifically about the role religion and spirituality play in their prosocial motivation and decision making. The final part of each interview asked students to speak directly on how to best encourage and motivate their peers to perform acts of kindness to others outside their friend groups. Students provided answers that engaged the normative and pragmatic tasks.

All of the participants appeared comfortable in the interviews. Each participant saw the interview questions in advance, except for number five, which I added about midway through the interviews (see appendix B). Only a few students found it difficult to tell stories in all three categories. The length of the interviews ranged from 17-49 minutes and the median length was 27 minutes. Some students said less than others but some talked faster than others. Each

[180] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2014), chap. 1, Kindle.

participant was able to complete the interview and express a reasonable level of comfort with the whole process.

Researcher Ethics

As an adult interviewing adolescents in a school setting, my role as a researcher is to be aware of the power imbalance, both perceived and real. Rather than asking questions in an instructive manner, Kathy Charmaz, suggests prefacing questions with, "May I ask you," allowing a student to consider whether or not they wish to answer the question.[181] In the interviews I began the first several questions with, "May I ask you," and transitioned into a more conversational tone as the interview progressed. At times I would return to using the specific preface, "May I ask you," when we returned to the major questions. I chose to move in and out of this framework to intentionally set the tone at the beginning but avoid the interview sounding too formal and stilted by using it throughout. I also explained to the participants how I wished to highlight their ideas and voice. During their storytelling I gave no judgment, prioritized listening, and let students talk with minimal coaxing or redirection.

If not already required by school personnel, it is always recommended that another responsible adult be nearby when interviewing adolescents.[182] Therefore, my interviews were all conducted in an area where office staff or faculty were present or nearby and fully aware of the interviews. I wasn't sure at first if the presence of their religion teacher in the same room as I was conducting several of the interviews would intimidate the participants or inhibit the answers

[181] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, chap. 3, Kindle.
[182] "Esomar World Research Codes and Guidelines: Interviewing Children and Young People," Esomar, last modified 2009, http://web.archive.org/save/https://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/ESOMAR_Codes-and-Guidelines_Interviewing-Children-and-Young-People.pdf.

or stories. I didn't notice any discomfort or hesitation on the part of the students. There was an adequate distance between the teacher and where I conducted the interview so it didn't feel awkward but rather as though the classroom was a workroom where several people could work alone without disturbing each other. It helped that the faculty members in the room were clearly well regarded by the students I interviewed.

Interviewees were clearly informed that they would be asked to tell stories about prosocial cross-group interactions and that the stories may include elements of antisocial behavior and social difficulty. Additionally, the participants knew that the stories and questions would include the sharing of religious and spiritual experiences and beliefs and that these topics could potentially create emotional responses of discomfort. The invitation to participate in the interviews and the consent forms clearly described the purpose of the interview, the topics to be covered, and the nature of the questions. Each interviewee was invited to pause or discontinue the interview at any time. All interview recordings, transcriptions, and notes have been kept confidential throughout the gathering and analyzing of the data.[183]

Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews I used the software Atlas.ti to code and analyze the data. Following Creswell's suggestion, I created emergent codes from the interviews as I went through them and I added codes I had created from the literature review.[184] I found that as I read through the interviews several times most of the emergent codes developed organically from the material. I did notice that a couple of the codes from the literature review began to reflect my bias in their

[183] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2015), 93-95.
[184] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 185.

favor. I note this in the findings and sought to include negative case analysis along with my reflexivity. I found myself favoring two codes. The first was kindness as presence which stems from Root's concept of youth ministry as incarnation versus influence. The second was the motivation for kindness from God's love which stems from my own spiritual journey and is a primary theological concept in the Christian tradition. I looked for common codes and noted density but also looked for those stories and statements that indicated alternative viewpoints and unique experiences.[185] Creswell cautions against reporting actual code counts since that implies a quantitative value to research that is intentionally qualitative.[186] As I coded the interviews I found myself agreeing with Creswell up to a point. When I realized that 10 of the 21 participants identified as experiencing social trauma[187] and described that as a factor in their motivation to be kind to others, I thought it should be noted. This density was a surprise and seemed significant enough to report in my research. It forms one of my major recommendations for future research.

My approach to analysis was similar to Creswell's data analysis spiral in which the researcher learns by doing and circles multiple times around the tasks of reading, memoing, reflecting, organizing, and representing the product.[188] I found it helpful to write small descriptions of key interview stories and statements in the context of my analysis. Once the writing was down I could circle back through as I reflected on the themes represented and began to compare them with relevant studies and literature.

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[185] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 216.
[186] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 185.
[187] L. K. Taylor and C. F. Weems, "What Do Youth Report As a Traumatic Event? Toward a Developmentally Informed Classification of Traumatic Stressors," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy* 1, no. 2 (2009): 10-12. doi:10.1037/a0016012. Taylor and Weems list a number of traumatic stressors that youth identify including but not limited to physical and verbal abuse, separation and loss, car accidents, substance abuse, self-harm, and psychological problems.
[188] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 183.

Perhaps one of the most critical tasks I have attempted in my analysis is to identify and disclose how my personal experiences with aspects of the interview data might actually influence the findings and conclusions in my study. Thus, my own reflexivity, alongside the various findings, is an important part of the analysis.[189]

As I began to analyze the codes I realized that I had two types of pictures emerging. First, there were powerful narratives that I wanted to share in ways that allow the reader to better understand what a teen actually experiences. From those thick narratives emerged a number of codes and concepts to note. Second, there were statements and shorter observations that gave additional views on the themes related to religious and spiritual influences, kindness, motivation, the teen world, etc. I selected both types of data to include and separated the findings accordingly into two chapters, one on narratives and the other on reflections. I looked for representational data that showed the general outlay of a teenager's social world. I looked for powerful narratives. I looked for functional lists and themes. I also looked for alternative and surprising data and negative cases. Then I walked back through my selections to begin a dialogue with the literature and my own positionality.

Limitations and Delimitations

I chose to focus this study on students who attend Christian high schools. Studies of adolescents in other religious traditions are informative for religious education in general but for my initial research project I wanted to stay within my current work environment. The findings and conclusions are directed toward educators, pastors, and parents who teach adolescents in a Christian context. However, I hope that the thick descriptions provided by these students can

[189] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 216.

create insights that will serve all who work with adolescents in both religious and non-religious settings.

My sample was taken from the schools in my geographical region who agreed to allow me to recruit on their campuses. The traditions represented in my study include Catholic and Protestant but do not represent the whole ecclesiastical spectrum. A larger study could include a better representation of the Christian tradition, however, my study focused more on the individual students who are attending Christian schools rather than the schools or religious traditions themselves. I did not ask students specific questions about their faith tradition nor did I make comparisons between traditions in my analysis.

I initially set a goal to recruit between 20-30 participants for this study. I considered creating gender balance, if possible, but only 23 returned a consent form and only 21 completed interviews. Of that number 15 were female and six were male. This number is on the low end of what I hoped to get, but as I progressed through the interviews I began to recognize similar themes emerge in the stories. There appeared to be data saturation in the key areas of my questions. Saunders et al. discuss several different types of saturation in qualitative research. A significant divide occurs between deductive and inductive studies. Since my study is primarily inductive and narrative, saturation serves the role of identifying when themes and data begin to repeat or reach a point where full expression and examples of primary themes become possible.[190] In my review of the transcripts I was satisfied that the sample size and content of the interviews reached saturation giving me an abundance of data to work with.

[190] Benjamin Saunders et al., "Saturation in Qualitative Research: Exploring Its Conceptualization and Operationalization," *Quality & Quantity: International Journal of Methodology* 52, no. 4 (2018): 1896-97. doi:10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8.

This study only used a single setting for the interviews. Ammerman's study used multiple interviews and extra sources of data such as voice recorded daily journals and photo journals. I found the single setting most efficient for securing approval for research with adolescents and for the scope of this study. Future research could benefit from extra sources of data, ethnographic depth, and participant action research in which a group of adolescents in a school are trained and given support to do the study, analyze the data, and create action plans that could profoundly impact their own campus.

I chose to limit the participants to grades 10-12 as this grouping includes students who are familiar with the high school setting and are transitioning to or at higher levels of thinking. Individual students will demonstrate different levels of cognitive maturity but in my experience teaching high school students I find that many of them mature quickly during the first half of their sophomore year in school. I conducted my interviews in the second semester of the 2018-2019 school year and felt most comfortable excluding freshmen from the study.

These volunteers are all students who knew the study was about kindness and religious and spiritual influence. This sample does not represent students who might be in the middle of the spectrum but rather ones who already have an interest in kindness. Since the focus was clearly stated to be religious and spiritual influence, it was significant that several volunteers were comfortable interviewing and stating their distance from organized religion or an active spirituality. In a way, these interviews provided some negative case analysis for the study. This study does not intentionally include interviews of non-religious students. Future research might wish to use a narrative qualitative study to compare adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction across a balanced sample of religious and non-religious participants.

Chapter 4. Findings – Narratives

Introduction

Adolescent prosocial development concerns all who work with teenagers. In a Christian community, educators, youth pastors, and parents all seek ways to encourage and support prosocial behavior in their students. A central prosocial value in the Christian faith tradition is to treat others, especially those outside one's friend group, with kindness. The purpose of this study is to provide practical insights about adolescent prosocial cross-group interactions for those who work with young people in schools, churches, and the home.

This study asks the following questions: What are the religious and spiritual influences that motivate adolescents to behave prosocially toward their peers who are outside their social group? How do those influences operate in the complex and dynamic social world of adolescence? What can we learn about cross-group interactions from the stories and opinions of students who walk the halls of Christian high schools?

The findings I discuss in the next two chapters are organized according to the basic structure of my interview questions. Chapter four contains findings that come primarily from the stories told by the participants in response to the first two interview sections. The first section, Social Context, includes findings from the first two questions in which I invited the participants to describe how they came to their current school and what their social world is like at this moment in time. The second section, Kindness Narratives, includes findings from the three invitations I gave to the participants to tell stories about kindness. I asked them to think about a time that they performed an act of kindness for someone outside their friend groups. I also asked them to think about a time that they wanted to do an act of kindness for someone outside their

friend group but couldn't complete the act. In the last question of this section I invited them to think about a time they chose not to do an act of kindness for someone outside their friend group. Chapter five contains findings that come primarily from participant responses to more specific questions in the last two interview sections. The third section, Religious and Spiritual Influences, includes findings from the answers to my questions asking the participants to define religion and spirituality, discuss the role that religion and spirituality play in their motivation to perform acts of kindness for people outside their friend groups, and discuss the role that they wish religion and spirituality would play in their motivation. The final section, Suggestions, includes findings from the final part of the interview in which I invited the participants to share any additional thoughts on kindness and to give suggestions for ways to motivate their peers to be more kind to others. In each section there are times when I include a participant's comments and stories that extend across sections because they are intertwined and provide a larger context for the original finding.

This is a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews in which I invite students to tell stories about kindness. The narrative emphasis supports my approach as a practical theologian seeking to learn from the lived experience of students. Analysis includes dialogue between the interview data, my literature review, and my professional and personal experience with the topic. The literature review draws from work in education, neuroscience, social science, and theology. My philosophical approach to the research holds constructivism and theism in creative tension in order to better understand religious and spiritual influences on adolescent prosocial behavior.

The research participants were 21 students in grades 10-12 from eight Christian schools in the Inland Empire in Southern California. The schools represented both Catholic and

Protestant faith traditions and ranged in size from 530 to 80 high school students. There were 15 female students and six male students. Participants who volunteered were aware of the research topic and knew the interview questions in advance. They all presented a clear interest in acts of kindness toward others. Interviews ranged in length from 17-49 minutes and the median length was 27 minutes.

I personally transcribed each interview and used Atlas.ti software to organize my data and codes. I created emergent codes as I read the interviews and added codes from my literature review in subsequent readings of the data.[191] I noted common themes but also looked for alternative views and unique experiences.[192] My analysis resembled Creswell's data analysis spiral and included a number of readings, memos, reflections, and drafts.[193]

Qualitative interview research primarily depends on the word of the participant as she remembers, mentally frames, and presents her experiences to the researcher. This subjective experience and self-reporting carries significance for qualitative research and specifically for studying personal motivation and influence. The measures I use in this study to increase the validity of my findings include negative case analysis, reflexivity, and noting data that presents alternative views or surprising results.

Social Context

I began each interview with a couple of questions that helped the participant and me get acquainted and provided some social context for the storytelling. In the first question I invited

[191] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 185.
[192] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 216.
[193] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 183.

students to tell me about when they first came to their current school. In the second question I invited students to tell me about their current social world.

Coming to school

The first day at a new school usually creates a fair amount of anxiety for students as they enter a new social world and begin to form friendships and join friend groups. I asked students to tell me about their experiences coming to their current schools because I wanted to hear how they met this social challenge. Brown's studies of adolescent social behavior underscore the importance for teens to learn how to integrate into a new social world and find friends.[194] The students I interviewed shared the common concern to integrate into their new school and find belonging. Some students already had friends and acquaintances on campus but others came from out of town and walked on campus not knowing anyone. In several cases, students in the interviews talked about the important process of finding friends in ways that alert us to the complexity of prosocial behavior in the context of a Christian campus. In some of the other stories, students talk about the impact of the campus atmosphere, especially when the student has experienced social trauma.

Camila[195] is a vivacious and outgoing junior in high school but it still took her some time to find a friend group in which she felt she really belonged. She came from out of town at the start of her freshman year and didn't know anyone.

> I didn't know anyone and everyone had friend groups or at least one other person they knew because they did sports or camps and stuff or they came from the same school. So for me, I kind of felt like an outsider a lot of the time. So, socially, I've been bouncing between a lot of groups and it didn't come until this year that I felt like I found my own group of people. But aside from the drama, everyone is nice here (she laughs). Typical high school teenage drama, stuff like that.

[194] Brown, "Popularity," 172-74.
[195] All participant names and some narrative details have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

Camila's experience shows that a campus can be friendly in a general sense but still present challenges for new students to connect and feel at home. Groups of students who already know each other may be friendly toward new students but they may still appear closed off to the newcomers just because they are so comfortable with each other and have a history together. On the other hand, Camila's comments reveal that new students can be highly selective about what kind of people they will ultimately call close friends. Christian schools may seek to encourage students to create a friendly campus but the dynamics of Camila's experience alert us that the process leading to belonging and friendship are complex and may take time to develop.

Mary describes herself as quiet and reserved. Mary is a new student at her school this year and it is her senior year! She tells the story of how a girl and her friend group reached out to her on the very first day of school and made her feel welcome. However, as she began to hang out with them she realized she didn't really like the way they interacted with each other and she began to feel like they didn't really want her to be part of their group. "So I found out that her and her friend group was really toxic and I just didn't feel comfortable with her and the people I was surrounding myself with so I moved to another group." Mary wrestled with this decision. She says, "I'm always told that I'm too quiet or I'm not sociable, so this year I was really trying to get out of my shell." When I asked some follow-up questions about her experience with the clique of girls, Mary shared more: "I just kind of felt judged by her and her friends, like they didn't want me there, like it was very reserved to her and them only… just kind of like, 'first day, she's new,' but I think that it should have stopped there you know, like it wasn't an invitation to come and hang out with us, we're just trying to be nice to you." We can see from Mary's experience that friendliness is not the same as friendship and that the intent behind

prosocial behavior as well as the perception of the recipient can make a significant difference in the outcome.

Mary's story also illustrates a couple of critical issues in the act of "inclusion." The first problem with "inclusion" in this situation arises when Mary realizes that the girls' acceptance of her is limited and ultimately misleading. Rather than an open invitation to friendship, the clique was only being nice and friendly in the moment with no plans for anything more.

The second deeper problem with the "inclusion" in this situation is that the girls who choose to include Mary retain social power in the group. They dictate how the group functions and they exercise the power of exclusion.[196] Even before Mary realizes that she is not welcome as a member of this group, she decides that she is not comfortable with how the group treats each other. She even begins to search for another group that she feels is less "toxic." Even if the clique had welcomed Mary as a full member, it appears she would want the power to create some different options for how to relate as a group of friends. Kujawa-Holbrook speaks to this issue in the context of interreligious cross-group interaction. "Power analysis and openness to structural equality and the redistribution of power among diverse groups are key values and skills in working for the common good."[197] Adults often instruct teens to show kindness by including others, but Mary's story reveals that we must be aware of the role of social power in inclusion and exclusion and work to model it at all social levels.

Anna is also a new senior at her school this year. She has attended numerous schools and been bullied often over the years. Anna speaks with a calm and quiet resolve. When she arrived

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[196] Margaret D. Kamitsuka and American Academy of Religion, *Feminist Theology and the Challenge of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11. Kamitsuka discusses attempts in feminism to address differences between white women and women of color. She cites Spelman's critique of attempts to include others while retaining the power to exclude them.
[197] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders,* 3.

on her current campus she said, "This school was different for me because I felt like when I walked in I didn't feel like I fit anywhere in particular but at the same time I didn't feel excluded from anywhere." This year when Anna started at her new school she decided against hanging out with a couple of students she already knew. They invited her to join them but she said, "I didn't feel excluded but at the same time I didn't feel like I fit in cuz most of these kids have known each other since middle school or all throughout high school." Anna still appreciated her new school and made an important observation about the impact of a school atmosphere.

> There wasn't that tension that I felt at my other school. Different environments shape different people, so my other environment kind of shaped me to be more reserved, more quiet, more conservative, and not let my guard down. It took awhile to get me to friendly talking when I first got here. As time went on, I kind of started saying hi to everyone, knowing everyone. It was a more friendly environment than hostile.

The new school gave her a more safe space to grow socially and begin to make prosocial decisions. Cozolino points out that when we do not feel safe our amygdala reacts before we even think about a situation and activates the fear systems in the brain. However, when we experience love and a sense of safety those fear systems settle down and we can be open to others. "Love is a relief from scanning the outer world for threat and our inner worlds for shame. Love turns off the alarm, cancels our insurance, and frees us from worry."[198] In Anna's particular case, even though existing groups of friends seemed closed off, the school atmosphere was significantly more safe than her prior schools and it allowed her to grow in her ability to behave prosocially.

In this new safer environment Anna says that she would just walk around by herself at times just observing everyone. During this time, she noticed a girl who was sitting by herself so she tried to be kind to her.

> I would walk around by myself at times and I noticed there was this other girl, who I thought was new at the time because she always sat by herself. She's been here since her freshman year, but she just didn't have a friend group. She was awkward and quiet and

[198] Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, 401-3.

> nobody wanted to sit with her. So I was like, "I'm new and she's by herself," so I decided to become her friend. At first, she rejected me. I guess she didn't want to be my friend, so I just let her be. As time went on, I found my new friend group and she would watch us and I felt like she was feeling a little bit jealous. So what I did was I incorporated her into my friend group and pretty soon we got her to talk, smile, and feel more comfortable.

Anna's story shows a number of important aspects of social integration and belonging. First, students like Anna can carry wounds from previous experiences which make them hesitant to open up and join new social groups. Second, a campus atmosphere matters in how the students perceive their social options. Third, Anna shows the ability of a student who is new and an outsider to choose a prosocial path of kindness toward another student who is alone. What is surprising about Anna's story is that even though the student she befriends initially rejects her, she is neither discouraged nor disrespectful of the student's resistance. Rather, Anna is attentive and creative and persistent in her efforts to befriend this student.

Griese and Buhs studied the effects of prosocial behavior on fourth and fifth grade students who had experienced peer victimization. The study found that boys who had been relationally victimized, but able to engage in prosocial acts, were less lonely a year later.[199] The authors note that extant research clearly links peer victimization to greater loneliness. Thus, they call for efforts to help victimized youth develop prosocial skills and behaviors.[200] Lim and DeSteno present two studies showing that "individuals who have experienced adversity attest to increased tendencies both to perspective-take and to place value on the welfare of others in

[199] Emily Griese and Eric Buhs, "Prosocial Behavior as a Protective Factor for Children's Peer Victimization," *Journal of Youth & Adolescence* 43, no. 7 (July 2014): 1060. doi:10.1007/s10964-013-0046-y.
[200] Griese and Buhs, "Prosocial Behavior," 1062.

need."[201] Anna's journey from victimized teen to persistent prosocial teen alerts those who work with young people to the potential for this kind of motivation and transformation.

Hannah, a calm and competent senior with leadership responsibilities, also came out of a school where she was being bullied and found her new school to be caring, supportive, and nurturing of her faith in God. She moved in the eighth grade and is now a senior at the same school.

> I was having a really bad experience at the school I was at so we moved right down the street and I started here. And I have loved it so much ever since. I am so thankful for my school, like, just how much the teachers care and how much my faith has been able to grow and stuff like that. I don't know if I would still have my faith throughout high school if I wasn't here.

Hannah's experience shows how the impact of a positive school atmosphere includes how teachers treat students and how students are nurtured in the real life application of their faith.

King and Furrow put forward social capital theory in a religious context and their study suggests that youth who are religiously active and connected to a religious community report more social capital resources which, in turn, affect their moral behavior.[202] In the case of Hannah, she shares how the teachers in her religious school community provided that vital resource for her faith development during a critical time in her life. Krane et al., in their study on the impact of teacher-student relationships, affirm the importance of teacher kindness toward students, especially in contributing to student wellness.[203]

As I listened to Anna and Hannah share their experiences of surviving peer victimization to becoming a positive resource for others, I was reminded of my own experience as a new

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[201] Daniel Lim and David DeSteno, "Suffering and Compassion: The Links Among Adverse Life Experiences, Empathy, Compassion, and Prosocial Behavior," *Emotion* 16, no. 2 (2016): 180. doi:10.1037/emo0000144.
[202] King and Furrow, "Religion as a Resource," 703.
[203] Krane et al., "Teachers' Kindness," 377-78.

student in the fourth grade. I was bullied for most of that year and it was the kindness and care shown me by my teacher that helped me to survive. My journey to a place of social stability was a long one but when I became a junior in high school I came to a point where I began to reach out to other students who were on the margins. When I began the interviews for this study I did not anticipate that almost half of the participants who volunteered would share a similar journey from experiencing some form of social trauma to engaging in acts of kindness toward others. I am encouraged that these teens are eager to tell their stories and I am hopeful that there are ways to better encourage and support these kinds of social transformations. I also recognize that I empathize with many of these participants because of my history. My bias is that I want to see this kind of transformation take place more often in the lives of those teens who struggle from their experiences of trauma. Even though I did not solicit these stories in the interviews I found myself gravitating toward them in my analysis.

The findings from this first question about coming to school highlight the importance of several key catalysts for adolescent prosocial behavior. A general atmosphere of safety and welcome on a campus is helpful but the process of belonging and developing friendships is still complex and unique for each student on any campus. Teachers and students can be positive resources for other students in their well-being and catalysts for their prosocial behavior. Negative social experiences do not have to limit the ability of an individual to develop prosocially. Religious educators and parents can increase their attentiveness and awareness to how adolescents navigate coming to a new school and seek to support the individual and group efforts of students learning to be more kind to each other.

Social world

The second question I asked the participants invited them to share with me what their social world looked like at this point in time. I wanted to know how students perceived the context in which many of their stories about their prosocial behavior took place. Students continued to warm up to me and get more comfortable with the interview process and they shared some observations about their social worlds that is helpful for understanding adolescent prosocial behavior.

Many of the interview participants acknowledged that their campus had social cliques, but they felt like those groups were semi-permeable. Not all participants shared this view, but those who did saw their campus as a place where they could move about and talk with most of their fellow students. Participants shared how group activities provided a key opportunity for cross-group interaction. In this section we see how individual students and groups of students have the potential to impact the social world for other students and the entire campus, however, choosing and engaging in prosocial behavior is not always easy.

Lucy described her campus as having a "family atmosphere." However, she also commented on her social group by saying, "We're kind of nerds, we're not the cool people." I asked her what that meant and how the two groups interacted with each other. "Well, it's kind of hard to explain, but you know, like when you see younger classmen hanging out with seniors then you kind of peg them as cool or popular and, for us, we don't necessarily do that. So I guess that's kind of why I said that, however, at the same time people still talk to each other and it's not like we hate each other or look at each other with disgusting faces (she laughs)." Lucy describes a situation that is reasonably friendly but still clearly demonstrates a social hierarchy in which only certain people can grow in social status.

My own experience with social hierarchy in high school was similar to how Lucy describes her school. I attended a relatively small private Christian school with about 400 students in high school. People in my friend group were not part of the cool group but we were on friendly terms with all the social groups in the school. However, I remember the odd feeling I got when I realized that certain freshmen and sophomores were accepted by the cool group of seniors and had status that I would never possess, even as a senior. When I was an underclassman this bothered me a lot. When I matured into an upperclassman it still bothered me but I was happy just enjoying my own friend group and inviting new people to join us. In all the years I have worked professionally with adolescents I have consistently had to check myself for how I interact with students who are part of the cool group. Some of the ways this group can treat outsiders remind me of the pain I felt as an adolescent outsider and it still makes me angry. As a teacher I possess a significant amount of power and I try to carefully treat everyone, including the cool kids, with respect and attention while also encouraging everyone to show kindness across social groups. I was surprised that very few participants singled out the cool group for judgment in the interviews. And yet, a majority of the participants who volunteered belonged to groups with lower social status in their schools or they demonstrated social traits that would seem to make it difficult to reach out to people outside their friend group.

In some cases, the participants pointed out that social groups form by common interest and that others can join if they want. Camila says,

> It's like most people tend to hang out with who they click with, like, the artistic and creative people tend to hang out with the other artistic and creative people. Like, I'm musical and stuff so I hang out with a lot of people who do musicals, but people who participate within that aren't necessarily hanging out with just those people. We have football players that help with the musical too, so, I mean, it's more about how you act versus what you do for your social groups.

Schools possess the enormous social resources of extra-curricular groups that can bring people together in unique ways. There is a natural tendency to click with certain types of people, but meaningful relationships can occur cross-group when a superordinate goal is in place. Batson points out that cross-group conflict can be reduced when one group member has personal contact with a member of the other group. However, he argues that bringing two people together is not always enough, so it helps to have a superordinate goal. "A superordinate goal is something that both sides in the conflict want but can attain only if the two sides join forces and work together."[204] Schools can provide both required and voluntary superordinate goals that can increase the chance of students from different social cliques working together and forming closer relationships as a result. A word of caution is in order for teachers who like to assign group projects. Required superordinate goals can easily backfire and create resentment among the group. In my experience as an educator, careful planning and scaffolding are critical for all group projects and attentive teacher supervision over the actual group dynamics is helpful for creating an overall positive group experience for students.

In one participant's school, the senior class was intentionally friendlier to all the other grades and trying to change the culture from what it was when they were freshmen. Caroline shared, "When I first got here there were a lot of cliques… and with time now, it's just kind of like, just like mush. We try to include everyone." I asked her what inspired the change and she referred back to how they all felt intimidated by the upperclassmen when they were underclassmen so they choose now to be more welcoming. "Our class is so laid back and so chill and it's kind of like, we'll talk with anyone, we'll invite anyone. I feel our class just isn't intimidating and we've heard that before, like, 'You guys are so easy to get along with!'" Siu,

[204] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 173.

Shek, and Law draw attention to the need for more research on how adolescents follow and shape prosocial norms. The authors discuss theories that suggest prosocial norms can originate from communal punishment and reward systems, conditional evaluation of the level of need, empathy and moral reasoning, and social learning.[205] Caroline's senior class appears to be motivated by empathy but not every senior class will make a group choice like this that seeks to change a school's social norms.

Alina points out that underclassmen at her school tend to value cliques more than upperclassmen but describes how she and her friends did things differently when they were freshmen.

> I think the younger classmen have a harder time realizing that that doesn't matter and that is not the point of high school. We figured that out super quickly and the first day of school we already cut that clique thing and decided, like, we're going to be friends with everyone, our little group. We kind of said, "We can go around to every single group and be cool with everybody because we're good people."

For Alina and her friends there is a sense in which they determine their own reality and most students were willing to allow them to create this positive flow between groups. Alina and her friend also found a way to influence their social world by joining the Associated Student Body (ASB) and encouraging others to join and participate in events.

> It's like, simple things like ASB wasn't looked at as a cool thing to do. It was like a nerd thing to do, but me and my friends are like, "so what, ASB's fun, we're gonna make it fun," and we did and we had a great time in it. And now, everybody wants to do ASB cuz they finally realized it's a cool thing to do. I hate that phrase, "Oh, that's not cool to do," or "that is cool to do." Everything's cool if you make it cool.

Alina represents the type of student we often think of as leading her peers in acts of kindness from a position of strength. However, she had to meet the challenge of being a new student and make some important initial choices that led to that social leadership.

[205] Siu, Shek, and Law, "Prosocial Norms," 1-3.

Alina's initiative as a freshman to step away from the culture of cliques represents an early development compared to most adolescents. Brown's studies show a shift from rigid social boundaries in middle school to much more permeable groups in the upper grades of high school. He cites research by Kinney and states that "By late adolescence, the status ordering had almost collapsed, and youth more easily formed close relationships across crowd boundaries."[206] This transitional time in the first two years of high school is an opportunity to encourage and support students like Alina to model a greater openness to cross-group interaction. Students who take initiative and have natural leadership abilities can be a positive impact on campus culture and their peers.

Julia represents a quiet and reserved student who prefers to have only several close friends and who doesn't feel comfortable moving around socially outside her friend group. "There are some people who are very social who move out of their friend group and bring more people in. I don't like that. I'm not like that. I may want more friends but I just kind of stay together with my close friends cuz I know that I can always depend on them, which is good, but it can be a problem if they aren't at places I want to go."

Even though Julia tended to stay in the comfort zone of her small friend group, she tried to be friendly with a girl in her class who was socially awkward and aggressive. Julia describes this girl by saying, "She could be very opinionated and loud about things, like, if she didn't like something then she would let it be known. If she misunderstood something when they were trying to help her she would get mad at them, so the class just saw her as, 'Oh, you don't want us

[206] B. B. Brown, "Adolescents' Relationships With Peers," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, 2nd ed., eds. R. M. Lerner and L. Steinberg (New York: Wiley, 2004), 386. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9780471726746.ch12.

to help you, so we won't, and we'll just leave you out of this.'" Julia spent a lot time with this girl the previous summer and found her to be really nice and fun to be around at her home.

> I noticed in the summer she felt more free, I guess, and not uptight at all. She acted more normal and very friendly and then once she got to school she was uptight and yelling at everybody. I don't really blame her because everybody saw her as a pain and so I think she was just like, "Okay, that's how you see me, that's what I'm gonna be." I also don't think my class intended to do that but they didn't realize that's what happened.

Julia continues the story and tells how when the girl came back to school in the fall students treated her so badly that she left the school. Julia struggled to stay friendly toward her but realizes she could have done more.

> Once we got back to school, she kind of went off into her own little world cuz I think she was afraid I didn't want to be seen with her. I felt really bad and after she left I reached out and texted her and said, "I'll miss you," and she took awhile to reply and said, "Oh, no, I could tell everyone wanted me gone anyway." I felt really bad because I did get through to her that I would miss her but I also apologized because I was friends with kids who treated her so badly. I wouldn't try to be mean but I could get caught up in stuff, you know, peer pressure.

Unlike Alina, who seizes the initiative, Julia admits she struggles to reach out to people outside her close knit and comfortable friend group. In this story, she also faces the challenge of befriending someone who is socially difficult and who pushes people away, even when they try to help. Julia was honest in her interview with me and admits that she was both helpful and part of the problem at times. On the other hand, even reserved students like Julia can find ways to be kind to peers who are socially awkward and aggressive.

The findings from this section show how the social world inhabited by teens can be challenging and complex but still contain room for students, both outgoing and shy, to reach out to each other and connect. Opportunities for connection and initiative stand out as key components to add to the resources of social safety and kindness by teachers and students.

Kindness Narratives

Once the first two questions were discussed, I invited the students to begin telling stories about kindness. Almost all of the participants came to the interview with at least one major story to tell about an act of kindness they had done for someone outside their friend group. I asked them to also think of times when they wanted to do an act of kindness but were unable to start it or complete it. The final invitation asked for accounts of times when they chose not to do an act of kindness. The three approaches to the topic of kindness were meant to give students a chance to describe the complexity of prosocial decisions from their experience. Batson, in his discussion on altruism argues for focusing on motivation rather than completion of an act since there are many variables that can prevent the completion of a prosocial act.[207] Naturally, we might wonder if students would just say they wanted to do something but couldn't just to make themselves look good. On the other hand, the last question allows students to tell stories about when they chose not to perform an act of kindness and explain their reasons. Sometimes they feel bad that they didn't do the act, other times they show how their reasoning played an important part in their choice not to act.

Acts of kindness

The first question invited students to tell a story about an act of kindness they did for others who were outside their friend groups. While there were many opportunities within the interview for comments and statements about kindness, this was a chance to tell narratives. My intent was to look for unique insights that come from the lived experience and context of stories. Therefore, I chose to highlight those accounts that revealed something surprising or significant to my research. This includes stories of persistence, providing mental health resources for peers,

[207] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 20-23.

and anonymous acts. Often the stories naturally transitioned into conversations that explained the motivations behind the original stories. In some instances I have included comments and stories from other parts of the interview to provide a larger context for motivations and influences in the narratives.

Acts of kindness: persistence

I have already shared part of Anna's story. She came to her new school as a senior and chose to befriend another student who sat alone every day. Even though Anna's first attempts were rejected by the girl she tried to befriend, she was persistent and, with the help of her friends, gently encouraged this girl to become part of their group. When I asked Anna to tell me more about why she chose to do this act of kindness, even when she was rejected the first time, she began by saying, "Her being quiet reminded me a lot of my sister, because my sister is very quiet. So, I was like, 'That's not right, we should get her to talk as well, make her feel welcome.'" One of the primary motivations for Anna's persistence was to imagine what she would want for her sister if that was who was in the situation. Rather than just give up being friendly, because it seemed difficult or unwanted, Anna chose to keep trying in creative ways to reach this girl, as if it were her sister.

Anna was not always in a position to reach out to people like she is now in her senior year. She tells the story of how she was having a really difficult freshman year and another classmate reached out to her and made a huge difference in her life.

> At one point, when I was alone, I was in a dark place and I tried to isolate myself as much as I could from anyone. But there was this guy that was my friend. He became my friend because he noticed that I was always gloomy and kind of wanted to be by myself. He made it his goal to make me smile at least once every day… I really appreciated him for making me smile and actually helping me look forward to going to school. He didn't know me too well, eventually he got to know me, but he did that good to me and I want to spread that good to someone else.

This part of Anna's story shows how a caring peer can be a significant source of kindness and a catalyst for future acts of kindness. Barry and Wentzel's study on how friendship influences prosocial behavior with ninth and tenth grade students showed that prosocial teens do influence their close friends to become more prosocial. Two elements of friendship that contributed to this prosocial influence were interaction frequency and affective quality.[208] Anna's friend may not have been a "best friend" in the common understanding of friendship, but he reached out to her every day and showed her that he cared. She credits him with influencing her to "spread that good" to others.

The consistent kindness and caring shown to Anna by her friend helped her transition from a place of hurt and isolation to a place of healing and prosocial behavior. Cozolino points out that early positive and negative relationships directly impact the development of the brain.[209] Yet, even though people grow up in imperfect environments and sustain experiences that create relational issues, neuroplasticity opens the door to potential healing and healthier relationships. Cozolino states, "Thus, the brain remains plastic into adulthood and can be changed for the better through positive interpersonal relationships. This plasticity depends on both top-down changes captured in narratives and bottom-up changes we can measure through brain activity and bodily experiences (Berntson et al., 2003)."[210] Relatedness is a primary need and the brain benefits from positive relationships to the extent that it can even overcome the effects of negative relationships.

When I asked Anna about the role spirituality and religion play in her motivation to be kind, she referred back to the story of her friend who made her smile each day. She said,

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[208] Carolyn McNamara Barry and Kathryn R Wentzel, "Friend Influence on Prosocial Behavior: The Role of Motivational Factors and Friendship Characteristics," *Developmental Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2006): 161. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.42.1.153.
[209] Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, 244.
[210] Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, 421.

> At that time, when I had all that weight on my shoulders, I actually cried and started praying and I just prayed for a sign, prayed for help. Then when my other friend somehow came into my life, little did I know that God sent my friend to "Make her smile at least once. Make her laugh." I saw that, me crying for help, it was answered. I was being heard. So I feel like I can go up to God whenever I'm in any sort of distress, even if I'm happy or sad, any emotion, and I can do anything with him by my side or watching over me. That inspires me to go out there. I'd rather be the first student to take the first step because there's nothing wrong being kind to others, even if it's a person nobody likes. Might as well reach out, this is high school.

Anna sees God as present and active in this story, answering her prayer for help, working through her friend to care for her, and inspiring her to share the kindness she has received with others.

Anna's story includes both the catalyst of a caring peer and the ongoing influence of God's care and support. Cozolino explains how the fear systems in the brain, located in the amygdala and posterior cingulate, slow down and become less active when people think about people they love and who love them.[211] Anna now has a mental anchor in God that can continue to sustain her in any kind of social situation. Anna probably wouldn't describe it this way, but Cozolino might say that, from a neurophysiological point of view, her focus on God can calm her fears that might cause her to want to isolate or give up rather than be persistent and engaged with the people around her. Theologically, God's compassion has impacted Anna and inspired her to be compassionate toward others.[212]

Anna's willingness to reach out to someone who was either socially isolated, or rejected, or both, and be persistent stands out from what we expect of adolescents. Brown points out that befriending unpopulars is risky.[213] Indeed, Anna responded to the question about a time when

[211] Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, 401.
[212] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 42.
[213] Brown, "Popularity,"181.

she chose not be kind by telling a story from middle school when she didn't stand up for someone who was being bullied.

> In my middle school class there was a boy. He had friends but not many people liked him because another boy decided to bully him, said he always smells and never showers… I was friends with him at one point… but the bully convinced so many people to think, "Oh, if you stick to him you're gonna smell," that for awhile I tried to fight but eventually I fell under peer pressure and I descended to my base instincts… and I felt bad cuz I remember seeing him cry at one point because it was getting to him.

Anna described a common situation in which kids evaluate the social risk involved in being friends with or being associated with unpopular kids and often choose to avoid them or stay silent. She concluded her story by declaring, "I wish back then that I had the mindset that I have now so I can just be strong and say, 'Naw, he's my friend. He don't smell. If he does, so what?'" We see in Anna's story the powerful motivational role a peer can play as one who cares for you and one who models caring for you. Anna also draws strength and motivation from God's presence, both in answering her prayer for help and in giving her inspiration to help others.

The place Anna is in now demonstrates a commitment to seek opportunities to reach out to others. As Gopin might describe it, Anna has been able to do inner work of healing. Now that she has experienced a sense of value and community she can reach out to others. [214]Mayseless points out that a key value in caring is generativity, setting one's life on a trajectory of caring. Instead of just reacting to situations that confront you, actively seeking ways to care for others every day.[215] Anna entered her senior year at this new school with a commitment to finding other students in need and to show kindness to them. I can see her continuing her commitment to persistent kindness throughout her life.

[214] Gopin, *Healing the Heart*, xiv.
[215] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation*, 113.

Lucy is a sophomore who describes herself as a "very, very shy person." She feels comfortable with her friend group and likes the school atmosphere. One of the stories she told about an act of kindness toward someone outside her friend group shows another example of persistence. Her story is also significant because she is shy and she is reaching out to another shy person.

> So when I first came here this girl would sit by the lockers and I'd see her just there studying and everyone else was like talking to someone and having fun. I was like, "Hmm, I wonder if that's fun for her or if she just doesn't have anyone to talk to." I was never able to hold a conversation with her so I decided maybe "hi" is enough. So, I walked by her and every day the whole school year I'd say, "hi!" "hi!" "hi!" After awhile I got tired of hearing my voice saying "hi" and I'm wondering if she's tired of hearing me say "hi" too. At the end of the year when we were signing yearbooks, I asked her to sign my yearbook and she did this really pretty design and she wrote, "I really like you and I'm really happy that you said 'hi' to me every day, it made my day special." And I was like, "Oh, wow!" and I started crying. I didn't know that just saying "hi" was actually doing something and I was really glad that I didn't stop.

When I asked Lucy about her motivation in this story she shared that her mom had suggested she say "hi" to the girl, but then she laughed and pointed out that "you don't always listen to your parents, so I think the biggest thing was that I related to her and I kind of understood her situation. So, I was like, 'Well, how would I feel if I were her? Would I want someone to say "hi" to me or would I want to just sit here and study with everyone just walking by me pretending I'm not here." Lucy mentions parental influence but prioritizes the golden rule in her motivation to reach out to this student. In this story, we hear Lucy speaking about one of the most basic human social needs, to be noticed and acknowledged as one who belongs. Lucy demonstrates compassion, as Rogers defines it, by seeking to alleviate suffering and promote flourishing.[216] Lucy demonstrates caring, as Noddings describes it, in terms of genuine

[216] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 30.

encounters, by recognizing her classmate as a fellow human being deserving of respect and care.[217]

Chloe is currently a part of several different social groups on her campus but she has felt shy and socially isolated in the past. She presents herself as pretty calm and easy going but she says that she still feels awkward sometimes. Chloe tells a story in which the person she is friendly toward is not necessarily open or comfortable to her overtures. "There's this one student who always seems pretty lonely and I always try to be friends with them and talk to them but it seems like most of the time they want to be isolated. But I still try to talk to them and keep the conversation going." Chloe shares that her motivation to keep trying with this isolated student is because she has felt shy and isolated a lot herself, especially during middle school, and she wants to "help that person not go through what I did." The story does not end in friendship, or even in a reasonable level of comfort. Chloe explains what happens in her encounters with this student. "She really tries to talk to us and get into the conversation but maybe runs out of things to say or things to relate to, so I just keep trying until I run out of ideas, because I also can be a pretty awkward person sometimes. So, I just bring up topics she can relate to like basic, even small talk, which is not very ideal in my opinion but, yeah, just small things."

Chloe's approach to this isolated student is significant in that she is willing to simply be present with her even when it is awkward. Root's idea of a ministry of incarnation and presence recognizes that a crucial part of being deeply present with someone includes the willingness to suffer with them.[218] Conversation is difficult for this girl and Chloe is willing to just remain in the awkwardness and bear with it in order to remain present.

[217] Noddings, *Caring*, 175.
[218] Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*, 15-17.

The conversation between Chloe and this girl is not very profound or intimate but pretty basic, small talk. Pickering's ethnographic study in the Balkans found that the basic and simple everyday exchanges between neighbors were more effective to mend the war-torn cross-group relationships than formal peacebuilding efforts.[219] More formal and dramatic attempts at establishing relationships can easily push people away, but the willingness to explore "weak links," as Pickering calls them, can lead to deeper relationships over time. Chloe doesn't know what kind of long term impact her simple and basic conversations will have in this relationship, but she is willing to be present and maintain a basic level of connection because she believes that is the kind thing to do in this situation.

Even though Chloe is willing to just be there and try her best to talk with this girl, she expresses her fears that "... sometimes maybe they don't want to talk to me. Because I still get anxiety about people not liking me and things like that. I wonder whether I should stop talking to them because, you know, they don't want to talk to me." One of the barriers to prosocial behavior that was mentioned by several other participants is the fear of being rejected. Chloe's acknowledgment of this fear highlights the uniqueness of her willingness to push through it and be persistent in her acts of kindness.

I bring up Chloe's story in this section on persistence because she does not connect her motivation to be kind to others to a religious influence. When I asked her about religious and spiritual motivation in her prosocial behavior she clearly separated them.

> Personally, I don't really think religion influences acts of kindness. I was raised to be religious but I think now I'm not religious at all, but that doesn't stop me from being kind because I feel like it doesn't really have anything to do with religion. It's just like morality that we've been taught since we were kids. But I've always wanted to do the right thing because, well, it feels nice when someone does something nice for you so why wouldn't you want to do something nice for other people who might need it?

[219] Pickering, *Peacebuilding*, 166.

Chloe's parents taught her a certain level of morality but she describes an intrinsic motivation to do what is right for others because it is the right thing to do and because it feels good to do it. She also acts out of empathy, knowing what it feels like to be socially awkward and wanting to spare this student some of the pain she felt when she was isolated and alone.

Later in the interview I asked Chloe to define what religion and spirituality mean to her and she said, "I would say religion is more based on going to church and following the Ten Commandments but spirituality is something a little bit separate from that, it's more like having a spiritual connection with God on your own." I acknowledged her earlier comment that religion doesn't play a role in her prosocial behavior and asked if spirituality played any role. She replied, "I believe in God, I just don't follow any specific religion, so that's why I would say I'm not really spiritual, but I definitely fit more into spirituality than religion." Chloe represents a student who cares about kindness and is active in a persistent way, but does not see her motivation as connected to religion, and not directly to spirituality either. Galen's critique of research that looks at religious and spiritual influences on prosocial behavior includes the observation that non-religious participants are rarely included in the samples. My study clearly did not invite non-religious participants, however, Chloe volunteered and felt comfortable openly discussing the nuances of where she is in her journey relative to being raised in a religious home and attending a religious school. Several other participants shared their location as closer to agnosticism or they talked about how their relationship with God is currently in a difficult place. When students are able to openly share their stories and discuss their feelings about religion and spirituality we begin to appreciate the complexity of their unique journeys and how kindness can be a part of their behavior due to a wide variety of influences.

These examples of persistence also show the difficulty of showing consistent kindness to students who are hard to like because of their behavior. Eisenberg points out that, "Children also are more likely to behave prosocially toward popular than unpopular children, persons considered to be likeable, and other prosocial children."[220] These students demonstrated the possibility for teens to go above and beyond the norm and be persistently kind to less popular teens. The influences range from a basic sense of doing what is right to the presence of God answering prayers and inspiring prosocial behavior. They also cited empathy, peer modeling, and parental influence.

Acts of kindness: peer resources for mental health

Qualitative interview research rarely notes frequency of codes, but I was surprised that almost half of the participants who volunteered for my study identified as experiencing some form of significant social trauma in their lives. They shared the ways in which their experiences empowered them to reach out to others. They also shared some of the creative ways they were helping their peers with struggles that they felt were adolescent mental health issues. The following two stories are examples.

Emma is an outgoing senior who describes herself as an "old soul" who would rather talk to people than spend time with technology! Before describing her act of kindness she shared with me her personal story of social trauma and how she came to a place where she could be a resource for others. As far back as she can remember, she says her dad was a verbal abuser and very scary to live with at home. In her sophomore year her parents divorced. She shares how "when they divorced it was like (long pause) like, really sad. My mom was heartbroken and I

[220] Nancy Eisenberg, *The Caring Child* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 139.

was heartbroken." Emma says she didn't tell anyone in her sophomore year about any of what had happened.

The very next school year Emma got in a car accident with her mom and suffered a severe concussion and torn ligaments in her knee. During her rehabilitation she received two very significant acts of kindness. The first involved her friends and teachers writing cards for her in a specific and meaningful way. Emma tells the story like this: "I love cards. Like, if you give me a card, I will save that card cuz I love cards so much, especially if it's handwritten, not like a text. And so everybody in my class and every teacher wrote: 'Today is a good day and here's why,' in the cards. I still have those and I usually have them in my car. That kindness had never really been shown to me and it was just the most amazing thing."

The second act of kindness Emma received involved a staff member who cared for her and was present for her. She says that her teacher, Mr. Wilson, is like a grandpa to her. "So, Mr. Wilson has been there for me through everything. I will go sit and cry in his office and he just sits there talking to me even though he has other stuff to do but he takes the time and effort to make sure that I'm okay. He's taken me home. He's given me food when I didn't have food at home. He's just been such a great role model and he's someone I can trust, and that's a lot." Emma reflects on Mr. Wilson's impact on her and adds, "It's huge how amazing a man he is. He is one of the people I trust with anything in my life. And I want to be that person for someone else, and not just one other person but for many people." Teachers are busy professionals who rarely have enough time to accomplish all of their tasks. Mr. Wilson shows a hint of Derrida's notion of hospitality when he allows his own schedule to be hostage to the needs of his

student.[221] The risk is that this sacrifice can go too far to be healthy for both teacher and student, but the deep value is how it builds trust with Emma and profoundly impacts her life.

Emma talks about how Mr. Wilson would encourage her to read the Bible to see how the characters in the stories dealt with their issues and how they learned to love each other. Mr. Wilson also invited students to be part of a team that meets after chapel to pray and talk. She described it like this:

> After chapel he invites students to meet and you just pray and you just talk to other kids. And kids share their stories and share how the Bible ties into everything that we do: how we all have a purpose and how God made us especially to be here on earth in the present time so that we can show love, caring, kindness, the fruit of the Spirit to one another. How we can love each other, how we can have patience with one another, and if one of us does something wrong to one another we forgive them and have compassion and talk to them and move on.

Emma sees the atmosphere of kindness on her campus as part of an intentional focus on the relational values connected to God and the Bible.

Cartland, Ruch-Ross, and Henry's research on social capital at schools is affirmed in Emma's stories. In their study, the authors found that when teens perceive the availability of social resources at their school they tend to add to those resources by becoming resources themselves.[222] Emma received social capital from her peers, from a group of teachers, and from one specific teacher who showed extra kindness when he perceived her need. Additionally, the chapel ministry encourages students to become resources of support for others. Emma's response is to want to be that type of resource for others and that is exactly what she does according to the rest of her story.

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[221] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 120-23. Yong discusses Derrida's idea of hospitality as a deep commitment in which the host becomes hostage to the visitor. Yong acknowledges the challenging paradox of setting boundaries that protect the self while still placing the self in the service of others in ways that can be a risk to the self.

[222] Cartland, Ruch-Ross, and Henry, "Feeling at Home," 305, 318.

Earlier this year, Emma was asked by one of her teachers to speak for the whole student body in chapel. This chapel is designed for students to share their personal experiences of what they've been through. Emma talks about how speaking for chapel opened up new opportunities for her to help people.

> So I spoke for chapel and I shared my experiences growing up with an abuser and how it affected me and a lot of kids reached out saying, "Hey, like, I'm going through some things sometimes too at home." Like, kids have reached out so we all go and get in a car and we just talk. Whatever is in the car stays in the car, it doesn't leave. We call them car talks. So we just talk to each other, kids talking to kids.

Emma became a resource for other students who wanted to talk about their issues with her and she informally organized a peer resource group that provides a ministry of presence. Root's concept of ministry as presence, as opposed to a formal program or a strategy of influence, may begin with an adult leading the way, but ultimately the goal is to invite and support teens to make the choice to be present for each other.[223] "Kids talking to kids."

Later in the interview, when I asked Emma specifically about the role she wishes religion and spirituality would play in her motivation to be kind, she talked about how it is difficult to believe in God sometimes because you can't see God. Yet, Emma says that she sees God in the acts of kindness others do for her.

> It's hard to believe in an almighty power who you haven't really seen and you've been through a lot, or you're going through something, and you're not really feeling like he's there for you. But I think that when people show you kindness, it's him trying to say, "Hey, I'm still here for you, lookit, I sent this person who is showing you kindness, who is showing you love, who is showing that they care for you. I'm here always and forever, like, please don't let go of me."

The adolescent girls in Baker's study came to a similar conclusion as they shared their stories of sensing the presence of God in acts of compassion and kindness.[224] Teens aren't the only ones

[223] Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*, 200.
[224] Baker, "Girlfriend Theology," 327.

who struggle to place their faith in an invisible God, but they also can grasp the powerful concept of God incarnate through the loving acts of people caring for each other. Their stories give a concrete expression of this key theological belief.

Emma concluded her interview with me by reemphasizing how important the experience of receiving kindness has been for her.

> If no one had shown me kindness, I don't think I'd be sitting here, because I've been through hell… and I mean I have been through hell. One person showed kindness to me, one person showed they cared, that they loved me, and that's the reason why I'm still sitting here. And I look at that and I think, "That affected me in a good way!" And if I affect people in a good way, maybe I'm doing that for them.

Emma's story shows the related impact of multiple resources of social capital, including a very dedicated teacher, on inspiring acts of kindness in a student. The power of caring presence, both as it was shared with Emma and as she shared it with others, presents a model of prosocial behavior that goes far beyond doing random acts of kindness as they present themselves. Finally, Emma's statement about acts of kindness reflecting God's care for us provides a larger context for her spiritual motivation to be kind toward others.

Hannah experienced social trauma at a previous school and at home. When Hannah was in elementary school other girls were mean to her. "People were so unkind to me and I know that's what tore me down, you know, having girls spread rumors about me and having times where I would have to eat lunch in the bathroom and things like that." When she was in the seventh grade her parents divorced. She and her mom moved to a new city and she began the eighth grade in her current Christian school. Hannah is very grateful for her overall experience at her new school, however, in her first year not all was well. She tells the story of feeling like she was the only one with problems. "When I first came here in eighth grade, it's like, I'm the only one with issues, like everyone has it perfect here. And it's a Christian school, everyone's great,

everyone's happy, everyone has the perfect family, and like, my parents are newly divorced and I self-harm." Hannah says she put herself into a local in-patient treatment center and thought she was the only one who had problems like that in her new school. Hannah expressed how grateful she was for the help she received from the mental health professionals who cared for her, however, it was difficult feeling alone and isolated on a very friendly and warm campus.

One of the strongest motivators for Hannah to be kind to others is her knowledge of what it feels like when no one is kind to you. She says, "Kindness is really important because I know what it feels like to not experience kindness, so I want to reach out to everyone I can in case they are experiencing that, because you can easily be a light in someone's day." Hannah describes her approach to kindness as doing the simple things that show you are there for people, like asking how their day is going, telling them they look good, staying up late on the phone with someone. She believes that God gave her the ability to listen well and give good advice to people. Hannah's understanding of kindness includes the idea that consistent everyday acts matter.[225]

This year Hannah was asked by her teacher to share her experience with the student body in a chapel talk. Like Emma, this opened up new opportunities to help people.

> My bible teacher actually asked me to share my testimony and so I went up there and I did and I had like multiple people either come up to me or message me on Instagram and say, "Hey, I was really touched by what you said." And I could say, "Look, you're not the only person feeling this way and if you need anything come to me and I'm here, like, you're not alone in this you know?"

Hannah talks about how difficult it was when she thought she was the only one with issues in the school, so now she takes the opportunity to encourage those who reach out to her to get help. She says, "If I hadn't just decided to reach out and get help, then I know I wouldn't be sitting here today, you know?" Hannah describes how it wasn't easy to talk about herself in front of people,

[225] Hardy and Carlo, "Religiosity and Prosocial Behaviours in Adolescence," 238.

but knowing that her words are making a difference for other students is important to her. She tells the story of a sophomore girl who responded to her chapel talk by messaging her on Instagram. "She said, 'I really appreciate it. I honestly felt like I was so alone in feeling this, and like, to see that you and other people have grown from it and grown out of it has given me so much hope.'" Hannah continues, "For me, that was why I got over my anxieties and got up there and did that because even if there was just one person in that room that needed to hear what I had to say, then I feel accomplished, I did what I needed to do."

Hannah frames her motivation to be kind to others in the larger picture of God's love. She shared her favorite biblical verse from memory.

> One of my favorite verses is Jeremiah 31:3. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." For me, it's like we're called to live like Jesus and live like God. So if he draws people with kindness and shows them love, then that's what we're supposed to do. Jesus was one of the most kind people to ever walk this earth and so it's our main mission as Christians to go and show the light of Jesus through us.

Hannah refers to the example of Jesus and his love for others as her primary religious and spiritual motivation for her acts of kindness. Dean and Foster point out how the early Christians also chose to follow the example of Jesus and show love to all people, not just their friends.[226] This was part of the mission of the early church. Hannah has a sense of discipleship and mission as part of her motivation to be kind to others outside her friend group.

Hannah talks about her future goal to be a social worker who assists foster kids. Her motivation is to "show the kindness that I either didn't get or the kindness that I did receive that helped me along the way." The young professionals at the local treatment center that helped Hannah made a deep impression on her. She connected with the student therapists who were in training. She would transition each year as they moved on but she points out how each new

[226] Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, 125.

therapist would "take me on and show kindness to me and connect with me." She recognizes the role these young adults played in her treatment and is both grateful and inspired to become an adult who helps children who are struggling with severe issues.

We see again that when a school provides social resources for teens they will turn around and share that social capital with other teens and increase the positive climate on campus.[227] Hannah's story shows how supportive teachers and staff at her school created part of the opportunity and inspiration for her to reach out to other students. The availability of mental health professionals in her community is another significant example of social capital. Hannah is grateful for this important resource but recognized that not all kids have these types of social capital available for them.

Acts of kindness: anonymous acts

Choosing to remain anonymous while doing an act of kindness can reflect several different motivations. In some cases it reflects some shyness or reserve while in other situations it is done to avoid creating awkwardness on the part of the recipient of kindness.

Nora, a lively and gregarious senior, tells me a story about a time she did an act of kindness and chose to stay anonymous.

> There was a girl in my history class this year and right around the time that she lost her mom she was really down in class. She was away for awhile and then she came back and she was sort of getting back into the swing of things and she dropped some change. It was all quarters and I had a few quarters in my pocket so I put them on the floor and I just picked them all up and I was like, "Here!" and I gave it to her. She counted them and she was like, "Oh, I thought I had less than this!" and she just put it in her pocket.

When I asked Nora what motivated her to do this act of kindness she replied, "I don't know. I mean, I don't really know what motivated me to do it, it was just like, 'Oh, I can!' so I just did." I was curious and asked why she chose to hide the fact that she added quarters to the change on

[227] Cartland, Ruch-Ross, and Henry, "Feeling at Home," 318.

the floor. “Then she wouldn’t notice or know it was me or it wouldn’t be a weird thing. It was such a bad thing to lose her mom, so if I could bring about a little good luck, you know?” Nora demonstrates the social cognitive skill of being able to think about the perspective of the person she is helping.[228] She wants the girl who lost her mother to experience a little bit of joy without the awkwardness of saying thank you or feeling weird because someone gave you money. Nora also demonstrates several of Rogers’ steps toward compassionate action. She is attentive to the girl, empathically thinks about what the girl is going through, and acts in ways that bring joy but not obligation to the girl.[229]

Lucy chose to tell me a story about a time she performed an intentionally anonymous act of kindness. “There’s this girl. She had a really really bad day and she was crying. So I went home and I made cookies and I wrote an anonymous note and I left it in her gym bag during PE. She found it and she had no idea who it was. I’m not her friend so she can’t recognize my handwriting or my tone. So she was just like, ‘Who is this?’ Yeah, she doesn’t know who did it to this day!” When I asked Lucy what motivated her to do this kind act, she talked about empathizing with the girl but she also had another unique reason for her kindness. “I also know that her friends, they kind of get annoyed with her, she often has mental breakdowns, but I know that you can’t always control that so it’s like, I think she really needs someone to let her know that she’s loved and special and that someone cares about her.” Lucy said that her friends share a concern for teen mental health issues and will look out for each other as much as they can each day. Lucy explained why she chose to be anonymous: “I just didn’t want to be known. I, I kind of like being off the radar. And, on top of that, even the Bible says, ‘You don’t have to do things openly, like praying openly,’ so, it’s like, if I’m doing something for someone, I don’t think

[228] Blakemore, “Development of the Social Brain,” 199.
[229] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 30-33.

everyone needs to know about it. I think the impact will still be there and she doesn't have to know." Lucy chose to remain anonymous due to some shyness, but she also understood that, in this case, it would be better to highlight the gift of caring than to draw attention to the one who cares.

When I was a senior in high school, I actively looked for opportunities to be kind to students who were new or on the margins. There was a girl who was socially awkward and aggressive. She didn't have many friends. I was friendly and talked to her but I also chose to send her anonymous warm fuzzy notes through the front office. The receptionist was in on the plan with me and thought it was a great idea. Each note said something fun and encouraging for the week. Once, I was chatting with the receptionist when the girl came to get her note. She was so excited that she told me all about these notes she was getting and how much they brightened her day. As she wondered who might be sending them, I just smiled and played along like I didn't know. I found a deep joy in seeing her joy and knowing that it wasn't tied to me as a person, it was just an affirming act that was giving joy to the recipient.

Unable to do an act of kindness

The purpose of inviting students to tell stories about times they were unable to perform acts of kindness was to better understand how motivation does not always produce action. Batson argues that since there are so many variables present when decisions for prosocial behavior arise it is very difficult to measure prosociality from behavior alone. He recommends looking to the motivation that each person has at that moment.[230] Another reason to hear from teens about times they felt they could not help someone else is that growing up often presents issues of competence. Deci and Ryan, in their social determination theory, emphasize that

[230] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 227.

adolescents need autonomy, relatedness, and competence for intrinsic motivation and optimal social functioning.[231] Adults who work with teens also can choose to listen and understand when students feel they cannot act in certain situations. I selected stories that represent an alternative view or an example that speaks to the challenge adults have in understanding adolescent prosocial behavior. These examples include when kindness is rejected, when shyness gets in the way, and lack of competence.

Unable to do an act of kindness: rejected

Emma told a story about another student on campus who she tried to befriend when they were both new freshmen. She said, "He just completely turned away and shied and said, 'please don't ever talk to me again,' and walked away." She felt that was rude and didn't try again until their junior year. Emma explained what happened when she tried to reach out the second time.

> Then junior year came, and I was like, "Hey, are you okay," and he just turned away and shied away and I felt like I wasn't trying hard enough and I just basically gave up on the kid. And I felt horrible… so, mean kids would talk about him behind his back and I always felt bad, and I'd be like, "Well, you don't know what's going on in his life, nobody does." You know we all have skeletons in our closet. I always felt so bad that no one ever really shared kindness toward him, or compassion, or felt empathy, or tried to become good friends with him, and tried to get him involved and stuff. It was just sad, and now he's not here this year. Kind of sucks.

Emma went on to describe the difference between how she viewed her attempts in both years.

> I was different freshman year compared to now. Um, I was just like, "Well, that's rude," and I just turned around and walked away. But then over the years you just start watching people grow up and after doing that for awhile you can just tell that he didn't want to have anybody around and that was really sad. I couldn't get through the gate and other times I just never tried. When I wanted to, I just didn't.

Emma's story gives us a little indication of how teens can change over several years. Blakemore shows how the social brain continues to develop the ability to mentalize through the adolescent

[231] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68.

years.[232] Initially, Emma was offended that this student rejected her kindness, but it wasn't until a couple years later that Emma stopped and tried to imagine what this student might be going through to remain so isolated on purpose. She couldn't get through to him but she did defend him to others when they talked about him.

Emma's attempts at being kind felt unsuccessful but she began to realize that an act of kindness requires some mutuality. Mayseless points out that caring does involve a mutual agreement on what is needed and what is wanted by both people involved.[233] However, Emma also acknowledges that kindness can't really be forced and sometimes the circumstances are beyond one's control. There is a sense in which Emma feels both incompetent to help and also frustrated enough that she gives up and walks away. On the other hand, as she develops the capacity to take the perspective of the other person, Emma shows a creative competence and shows kindness by defending her classmate when others gossip about him. Adults who work with teens can benefit from understanding that the social brain is developing and teens will make mistakes along with creative discoveries. Therefore, teens need our patience, understanding, and consistent support throughout their development.

Unable to do an act of kindness: shyness

Mason emphatically describes himself as not very social or outgoing. He talks about wanting to be friendlier toward kids who sit alone but being afraid that his shyness will just make it more awkward than it already is. "Like I said, I'm not very social. There are a few kids here who sit alone sometimes. So, I want to go help them and just give them some company, someone to talk to, but it's really hard, cuz I'm not social. I can't think of things to say, even if I do go over there. So, I end up not going most of the time, cuz I'm worried I'll make them feel more

[232] Blakemore, "Development of the Social Brain," 195.
[233] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation*, 255.

awkward." Hall discusses how people with disabilities sometimes use self-exclusion as a way to protect themselves from mistreatment at the hands of others.[234] The students who sit alone on Mason's campus and every campus aren't necessarily disabled, but they may in some way share the desire to avoid the pain of being excluded by others by simply excluding themselves in advance. Mason is already very sensitive to social awkwardness and this creates a difficulty for him to reach out even though he wants to help in some way. Reaching out to students who might be choosing self-exclusion presents unique challenges since it often takes time and consistency to build trust, as in Anna's story, or it may result in rejection, as in Emma's story.

Mason did tell me a story about kindness he showed toward another student but he clarified that it was a response to a request for help and not initiated by him. An ESL student asked Mason for help once and now Mason regularly helps him in the two classes that they have together. Mason describes how it began: "The first time, he approached me in class. We were sitting by each other and I'm in a couple classes with him so it's like he knew my name. He asked me if I could explain something and we're friends now just from like, being here together. So it's just been easier and easier to help him." Hutman, et al., in their study on male adolescent relatedness, build on previous research noting the importance of shared tasks. "Developmental theorists (e.g., Maccoby, 1990) explain that males tend to relate around tasks and shared activities. According to Maccoby (1990), males are more likely to establish close relationships when they have well-defined roles, structured environments, and shared tasks that involve working toward a common goal."[235] Mason shows a higher level of comfort helping his male classmate when he is asked to help and when there is a defined role such as helping out with

[234] Sarah A. Hall, "The Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research* 3, no. 3 (2009): 163.
[235] Hutman et al., "Indicators of Relatedness," 3.

tasks in the classroom setting. When the act of kindness is more ambiguous, such as going up to students who sit alone and creating conversation, it is more difficult for Mason and perhaps other males who prefer defined roles and tasks.

Landon also describes himself as very shy. He talks about wishing he could reach out more often when people around him are in need.

> There's been a few times when someone's crying and I wanna ask, "Hey, what's wrong," or like, "Are you okay?" and I don't. I'm scared to speak to that person, to step out, but I have in the past. It was my sophomore year, there was this girl and, um, in the middle of class she just started crying and walked out. I asked, "Hey, are you okay?" and she's like, "Yeah, I'm fine," and she just rushed out. Yeah, that's one time I stepped out. And I'm actually dating her this year! Yeah, so, cuz she came back!

We laughed together about how the story turned out. When I asked Landon if he could say more about what makes it difficult to step out he shared that he has Asperger's and that it's been a struggle to accept this reality. "I think just to be different, it's hard. It's hard to be different and accept that. Yeah, I've had struggles accepting being different and stuff, cuz I have Asperger's, and that's been like a major thing I've been trying to deal with for the past year… just talking it out with my mom and dad. It's hard to come to accept it at first, but it's what makes you special in a way and, yeah."

Landon represents another interview participant who describes a unique journey that involves significant social challenges and finding a way to reach out to others in kindness. In Landon's case he finds support from his parents and he speaks of claiming his unique identity as special in a good rather than bad way. However, he is honest about his limitations and shares that even though he wants to reach out to others, he usually doesn't follow through.

In the stories of both Mason and Landon there are significant personal challenges to initiating acts of kindness or even responding to prosocial opportunities. Seeking to understand where different students are coming from is helpful when trying to encourage and promote acts

of kindness. It is significant to note that both Mason and Landon do find ways to perform acts of kindness for others who are outside their friend groups even though they don't fit the stereotype of the prosocial student with a strong and outgoing personality.

Unable to do an act of kindness: competence

Aiden comes across as a very articulate, confident, and well-read student. In his story he describes a very difficult situation in which his family has a history of abusive relationships. His approach recognizes how challenging it is to actually create change, but he feels compelled to do something to help. "I think it's just something that through the generations has just been accepted by the women in that part of my family. How I'd go about changing that would be, I would never call anything difficult, but it definitely wouldn't be a walk in the park. I'd have to be very careful how I used my words, um, how I bring stuff up." Aiden realizes that his options to help in a family situation like this are limited to carefully worded suggestions. However, he spoke of developing a specific type of competence in the future that he hopes will help others. "Although I can't mend that situation right now, I can definitely do something for people who haven't yet been born and that is getting into office and getting legislation through so that people yet to be born won't have to go through that." Aiden draws much of his guidance for life from the memoirs of past presidents of the United States. His own career plans include politics and part of his motivation comes from a desire to make things better for people through legislation.

This is the closest any of the participants come to connecting kindness to more formal acts of social or political justice. Mussen and Eisenberg's definition of prosocial behavior includes these attributes but the literature on kindness doesn't appear to reach that far. I appreciated Aiden's vision for making a difference for others in the future who are not even his kin. Aiden's story also illustrates the importance of Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory,

specifically as it refers to the need for adolescents to develop competency in order to engage in prosocial behavior.[236] It is to Aiden's credit that he recognizes how long term planning and goals can help him develop competency for far reaching prosocial behavior.

Choosing not to do an act of kindness

Not all of the participants shared stories of times they chose not to do an act of kindness, but those who did were candid about their reasons and the circumstances surrounding their choices. Some of these stories represent acts students believe they should have done but didn't. However, other stories show the complexity of some prosocial decisions for teens. Their options aren't always so clear and they use a rationale from within their own particular context rather than one that adults might prefer. I asked this question hoping to complicate my own understanding of prosocial decisions. When I teach my students or speak to my own children as though these decisions are simple, I fail to respect their unique personhood and the complexity of real life situations. The examples I chose to share in this section highlight the challenges of prosocial decisions and include protecting one's ingroup, self-care, and not reporting on a peer.

Choosing not to do an act of kindness: protecting one's ingroup

In this study, I specifically wanted to look for acts of kindness that stretched across group boundaries and outside one's own group of friends. However, prosocial behavior certainly also includes helping those who are closest to us. The concept of protecting one's ingroup at the possible expense of those on the outside is not usually seen as kind behavior. My interview with Mary uncovered a struggle that many of us can relate to when it comes to prosocial decisions.

When I asked Mary if she has any stories about a time when she chose not to do an act of kindness for someone outside her friend group she described how there are people she doesn't

[236] Ryan and Deci, "Self-Determination Theory," 68.

like and chooses not to help. “If I didn’t like a girl and she asked me for something, I’d be like, ‘Oh, I don’t have it.’ I don’t want to give it to her simply because I don’t like her or I don’t want to talk to her.” Most of us can relate to this response. I wanted to know more about how Mary determines who she likes and dislikes so I asked her, “How did you determine that you liked someone and didn’t like someone and how did that become the dividing line in some of the cases for helping or not?” Mary replied, “If I see somebody and I don’t like them, it’s because they either do or say something to me or somebody that I love or somebody that is a close friend. That’s how I determine. Or if you know they’re just not a good person, I don’t feel like I have to, um, I don’t know, do something for them.” She further qualified her statement by saying, “Yeah, but it’s like when it’s extreme, like, they’re either spreading rumors about the person, saying transphobic, homophobic, racist comments. Or, um, they’re just bullying, being physical, verbally abusive, things like that.” Initially, Mary’s comment can stand alone as a situation many of us experience when we just don’t like certain people. Her added qualifications may be a partial attempt to back away from what sounds selfish or petty, but they can also be a window into how students will make certain decisions to protect their ingroup from those people, both inside and outside the group, who hurt the ones close to them.

Feinberg et al. introduce the concept of prosocial gossip, which is not quite the same as Mary’s decision not to help those who hurt her friends, but it is related in that the action is motivated by the prosocial desire to help people in need.

> Though gossip is often viewed as trivial or even antisocial, these results support a view of gossip as, in fact, prosocial and critical to the reputation systems that help sustain fairness and cooperation in groups. Through the sharing of reputational information, antisocial individuals’ reputations can precede them, serving as a warning to others who might otherwise have faced exploitation. A critical factor driving individuals’ reputational information sharing is their underlying prosocial motivations, their desires to benefit and help others. As a result of these benevolent motives, individuals can more carefully select

> their interaction partners, developing mutually beneficial and trusting relationships with others.[237]

Mary declares that the people she chooses not to help demonstrate actions that clearly harm other people. When groups choose to withhold expected prosocial action from individual members they run the risk of ostracizing people for the wrong reasons, but they also can be acting to send a message that certain behaviors are hurtful and not to be tolerated in the community.[238] In light of ingroup bias and protection of one's ingroup, Mary's motives appear to be mixed, but we see the complexity of the adolescent social world and how teens might view their own prosocial decision making as necessary and appropriate for the context.

Rogers addresses situations like the one Mary describes by acknowledging that hurtful behavior must cease. But he offers the biblical vision of transformational compassion as a better option than refusing to be kind toward those who are hurtful. Since people who hurt others do not expect a response of love, showing love and kindness to them is a significant move that can open up their hearts and lead to transformation.[239] Mary's candid reflections show how teens may understand kindness in conflicting ways. The challenge for adults who work with teens is to appreciate the perspective of each teen we counsel and walk with them as they reason through their prosocial decisions. In a Christian context, religious educators seek to encourage teens to grow in their understanding and expression of calling out injustice and showing transformational compassion.

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[237] M. Feinberg, R. Willer, J. Stellar, and D. Keltner, "The Virtues of Gossip: Reputational Information Sharing As Prosocial Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 5 (2012): 14. doi:10.1037/a0026650.

[238] Jeffry A. Simpson, and Lane Beckes, "Evolutionary Perspectives on Prosocial Behavior," in *Prosocial Motives, Emotions, and Behavior: The Better Angels of Our Nature*, eds. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R Shaver (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 48. The authors describe this as strong reciprocity.

[239] Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 124-30.

Choosing not to do an act of kindness: self-care

Hannah's story about acts of kindness, shared earlier, shows her willingness to use her experience struggling with self-harm to help others who might be going through a similar situation. However, when I asked her to share a story about a time she chose not to do an act of kindness, she told me about how she had to learn to say no to certain people at times to protect her recovery from self-harm. She talked about understanding that her own well-being has to come first in order to help other people. Specifically, she began to watch for situations where she was triggered by the situation at hand. She has learned to refer her peers to others who can help them when she feels she cannot.

> Early on, when I was still struggling, I was helping people and stuff like that but I would definitely try to stay away from anything that would trigger me. I put so much emphasis on helping other people and showing them kindness, I've struggled to realize that my happiness comes before other people. I was helping other people with things that would trigger me and then that would be bad for me… Early on, if I knew I was going to be easily triggered by it, I would try to provide for them like, "Oh go talk to this person," or something like that."

Self-care in this case is not selfish but rather essential to providing good care to others that is healthy and sustainable. Hannah is fortunate she learned how to say no and balance her caring for others. Mayseless suggests that caring skills need to be taught so that caregivers can remain healthy and balanced. "Optimal caring has to balance the variety of needs of the care receiver and to respect her or his integrity and autonomy while considering the needs of the caregiver and also the needs of others around them. It must thus be enacted in a *judicious*, *respectful*, and *thoughtful way*."[240] This is a lesson adults can learn as well as teens. Adults who work with teens must remember to understand relational balance for their own lives, teach that balance effectively to teens, and work for greater balance in our schools, churches, and places of work.

[240] Mayseless, *The Caring Motivation,* 338.

Caroline tells the story of her breakup with her boyfriend as an example of a time when she knew she would not be kind toward him or his new girlfriend. Complicating the situation was the fact that all three of them were friends. When Caroline discovered that her boyfriend had feelings for the other girl, she knew she needed to break up with him, but she also asked the girl to wait awhile before getting together with her now ex-boyfriend. The girl reassured her that she would wait and then, as Caroline tells it, things happened fast.

> She did the complete opposite. They like wasted no time. They're like, "We like each other," flirting, like in front of me too. Or they'll be like so scandalous and I'm like, "What is that noise," and then like, "Oh, there they are!" you know, so it was kind of annoying to see. So then one day, my friends are like, "It's okay, just ignore it," but I couldn't. So I talked to her again, but this time I was like, I was rude, I was, I just wasn't myself, I was like, "Noooo, I cannot be your friend. I don't wanna be your friend. I am not your friend!" I just kind of went off on her. After, I was like, "Oh my goodness, what did I just do?" Right now, we're just kind of avoiding each other. I know there will come a day before I graduate where I will apologize, like, "I shouldn't have done that," but right now I'm feeling that way. I should have been nice and I should have been the bigger person all the way through, but it was just so hard… It's so hard but nobody's perfect.

Caroline's story reflects the struggle many of us face when we are hurt by other people. We get angry and then we wonder if we went too far and how we will be able to make things right. On the other hand, in Christian culture there can be a neglect of self in the name of being nice. There is a time to be angry and there is a time to let people know how you feel. There is a time to work through forgiveness and reconciliation as well, but those tasks don't usually go well unless there is brutal honesty throughout the process. Caroline was honest with me as she told the story. It seemed there was still some residual anger. She was honest with her friend about how she was hurt and how it made her feel and what her limitations were at this point in time. Caroline's challenge was to channel her sense of justice and her sense of kindness together into the healing and reconciliation process.

Gopin's practical steps for peacemaking suggest that reconciliation starts with the inner work of the self. The steps are: "Be, Feel, Understand, Hear, See, Imagine, Do, and then, Speak."[241] All of these steps are useful, but I am particularly intrigued with the ability to imagine as described by Gopin.

> Imagination, when used carefully and constructively, can solve our problems. The key is to free ourselves of preconceived ideas about our adversaries and about ourselves so we are able to conceive of new ways of living together outside destructive conflict… Imagination can cause trouble, however, when we have dreams that require other people to be or behave in a certain way.[242]

In Caroline's case, she told me that she can already imagine a process of reconciliation. Imagination is a powerful tool for teens. Gopin warns that imagination must be handled appropriately so as to avoid projecting required behavior on others, but the hope that imagination offers can find the means for healing and reconciliation when there seems to be no way.

Choosing not to do an act of kindness: not reporting on a peer

Valeria is a student who shares that she was raised to put everyone else before yourself. She describes her motivation as coming from how she was raised and her religious beliefs. She says, "I just feel like it's my principles, it's just my second nature to put everybody else's feelings before myself and I think it's a little bit more of my religion when Jesus tells us, 'Here are the two greatest commandments: love your neighbor and love God.' And so I feel like that's what I should be doing, I should be making life happier and easier for other people if I can." She acknowledges that this can be out of balance and she talks about how her therapist encourages her to put herself first sometimes. She goes on to say, "I love seeing other people's happiness because at times I didn't have one drop of happiness and seeing other people happy somehow fulfills me."

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[241] Gopin, *Healing the Heart*, xvii.
[242] Gopin, *Healing the Heart*, 132.

Valeria is currently in foster care. When I asked her if she had a story about a time when she wanted to reach out to help someone but couldn't, she shared the following story.

> I lived for two years with my maternal mom. When I was in grade school there was a guy in my class, and he, um, he obviously was getting abused. He hid it from the teachers. He hid it from everybody, but I knew the signs and I knew what it felt like. So, I wanted to reach out, but if I said anything like, "Hey, I'm getting abused too!" then you know something would have blown up. I really wanted to go and approach that person and say, "Hey, it's gonna be okay, you need to get help, like, you need to get out. I know it's gonna hurt, but you need to get out of that circumstance before anything gets worse." And I wanted to help, I wanted to notify someone, but at the same time I knew what it's like to (pause) if someone tells, um (pause) your circumstance then your whole world's gonna change and it will be somehow worse. So I felt like I had to say something but I would ruin his life if I did, so that's why I didn't.

Valeria made this decision in sixth grade, but she is remembering it and framing it for me now in the context of not being able to help someone. However, her decision reflects a rationale that, given the options she had, makes the best choice possible for her classmate by not reporting on his situation. As a mandated reporter who works in education, I immediately thought of how Valeria should have told a teacher so that a report could be made to Child Protective Services (CPS) and a proper investigation conducted. As a child who knew firsthand how disruptive a CPS intervention could be, Valeria saw the situation very differently than me. I still support mandated reporting and appreciate the work social services do for children every day, however, this story forced me to consider why teens often avoid reporting on each other even though they are instructed by adults to do so.

Valeria's lack of trust in the process of a CPS investigation may signal why other teens refuse to report at-risk behaviors of their peers to adults. When that trust is absent, a decision to not report may be understood by the teen as an act of kindness toward their peer. The behavior may not be good for the person, but the consequences of placing him in the hands of an

untrustworthy adult is worse. Clark's ethnographic study of midadolescents in a public school setting compelled him to conclude that many teens feel abandoned by the adult world.

> Due to the midadolescent's recognition that for most of his or her life the norm has been a lack of authentic concern and care at almost every turn, few are able to easily trust an adult who does reach out. . . Systemic abandonment has created an environment in which midadolescents believe they are truly on their own. As a result, they go underground; they pull away from the adult world. This causes a uniquely ordered society, a world beneath, a world in which rules, expectations, a value system, and even social norms are created to maintain an environment in which the middle adolescent can achieve the single most important goal of this stage of life: survival.[243]

This bleak description of the adolescent world may not completely transfer to all school communities, but elements of this survival mentality certainly exist in the lives of individual students who have experienced trauma like Valeria.

Defining kindness

During the recruitment of participants and throughout the interviews I substituted the phrase "kindness to others outside one's friend group" in place of "prosocial cross-group interaction." Kindness was a concept that the interview participants clearly understood. They came prepared to tell their stories and talk about how and why kindness mattered to them. Kindness is not quite as global of a concept as the definition of prosocial behavior given by Mussen and Eisenberg but I was surprised that the students gave examples that touched on all of the key elements. The definition once again reads as follows:

> Prosocial behavior refers to actions that are intended to aid or benefit another person or group of people without the actor's anticipation of external rewards. Such actions often entail some cost, self-sacrifice, or risk on the part of the actor. A wide variety of behaviors is encompassed by this rubric, including generosity, altruism, sympathy, helping people in distress by giving material or psychological assistance, sharing possessions, donating to charity, and participating in activities designed to improve the general welfare by reducing social injustices, inequalities, and brutality.[244]

[243] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 39.
[244] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring*, 3-4.

The interviews reflect many of the behavioral categories in the definition. For example, generosity shows up in stories where students give money, food, time, and various gifts that show care for another person. Altruism can be seen in the stories where students choose to remain anonymous while helping someone else as well as in situations where students risk rejection from peers and even rejection from the people they are trying to help. Many participants point to empathy and sympathy as key motivators in their decisions to be kind to others. Some can feel what the people they are helping are going through while others try to understand what they are feeling or relate the situation to how they might respond if the students needing help were friends or family members. A number of students talked about how they reach out to peers who need emotional support in the face of mental health challenges. Students didn't mention donations to charity in the form of giving money to charitable organizations, but several talked about decisions revolving around giving money to homeless people. Several students framed their actions as addressing bullying and trying to create a more inclusive school community, but some students also shared how fear of becoming a victim of brutality or not knowing what to do in the face of brutality prevented them from taking positive action.

During the interviews, the concepts of kindness and prosocial behavior took on depth and breadth as teens gave examples of how they shared, received, and understood kindness in their everyday lives. In the course of analyzing the narratives, I began to identify as many of the different examples of kindness as I could and created a list (see appendix C.1). The list does not exhaust all the potential ways we can show kindness to each other, but it does reflect many of the common categories of prosocial behavior in Eisenberg's definition. Out of that list I selected several examples of kindness that challenge the conventional understanding of kindness. These include friendliness vs. friendship, presence, and challenging behavior.

Defining kindness: friendliness vs. friendship

Kindness is generally accepted as a good thing to share with others. However, determining what is actually kind, both in deed and in its perception, is often more nuanced and complicated. Three stories shared by different participants illustrate some of the challenges associated with friendliness, friendship, and the idea of inclusiveness.

Two of the stories have already been told earlier in this chapter so I will refer to them briefly. Anna reached out to a girl who always sat alone but her overtures were initially rejected. Over time, Anna included her friend group in a plan to slowly invite the girl to join them and develop an atmosphere of comfort and friendship. Anna's story about creative and gentle persistence in the face of initial rejection shows how offering friendship is not always easy but can be a wonderful gift when it is accepted.

As a new student, Mary thought that a group of girls were inviting her to join them in friendship. However, she soon realized that the act was only meant to be one of temporary friendliness and not a real offer of friendship. Mary's story about limited friendliness reveals the dark side of inclusion in that those who have the power to include also have the power to exclude and they tend to dictate the terms of the relationship.

The third story is unique in that Ashley found her offers of friendship to new students functioning like a stepping stone for them. Ashley is animated, friendly, and describes herself as a serious student. She told me the story of how she was friendly to a new girl who came to school late and didn't have a friend group. "I just remember me going out of my way and kind of inviting her to my group and talking to her." Ashley continues by reflecting on how she likes to reach out to anyone who is alone but also how those initial friendships don't really last.

> Whenever I see someone just not being able to connect with other people my heart really goes out to them so I really like to sit with people when they're all alone and when I see

> that they don't really have any friends. I know how it feels to feel alone, to feel isolated, to be in a strange place. There were a lot of times where I just reached out to people but what happens is, I reach out to them, I hang out with them, but it doesn't really last. So they will come to our group and then they will find their own place and they'll leave and so I'm just kind of like the pathway. I just want them to feel comfortable, to find new friends before, like, the awkward situation before finding new friends. I want them to feel comfortable in that position, but I just know that they're really not going to stay with us because we're just the stepping stone.

When I asked Ashley how she felt about that role as a stepping stone, she shared that sometimes she wishes people would stay in her friend group and become a long term friend but that it's really okay with her.

> I'm not very attached to people, so yeah, it's been okay. It just makes me happy that for the small moment that they were there, they weren't like, "Oh gosh, I don't know where I'm gonna sit for lunch. Oh my gosh, I'm so scared, like, I want to go to that beach party but I don't know who to go with." And I'm kind of happy for that small moment they were kind of comfortable with who they were, where they were.

Ashley demonstrates both empathy and a level of kindness that doesn't ask for anything in return. Her willingness to be okay with a role as a stepping stone opens up another way to see presence and belonging as fluid and truly free, with no agenda or strings attached.

Ashley's ability to invite new friends into her group and then let them go without any resentment appears to illustrate the paradox of Aron and Aron's self-expansion model. The self-expansion model understands prosocial cross-group interaction as self-enhancing without being selfish. The satisfaction of gaining new relationships is countered by including others in beneficial and open ways.[245] If Ashley held on to her new friends and felt betrayed when they moved on then her self-expansion would be selfish. Her willingness to understand and support their desires to move on and join other friend groups demonstrates her unselfishness.

[245] Brody et al., "Compassionate Love," 286-88.

Ashley's kindness toward new students also shows the spirit of hospitality. She creates a safe space for students while they are adjusting to the new school.[246] It is safe because they are not alone, someone is there with them, but it is also safe because they can leave when they are ready to establish new friendships. In Yong's discussion of hospitality, we see the idea of giving up one's control over one's vision for helping the other.[247] Ashley shows her commitment to this understanding of kindness and hospitality.

Defining kindness: presence

The idea of being present for someone else is another form of kindness I noticed in several interview stories and comments. Hannah describes kindness in terms of simple acts that show you care including the willingness to stay up late on the phone just to talk.

> Kindness is really important because I know what it feels like to not experience kindness, so I want to reach out to everyone I can in case they are experiencing that. Because you can easily be a light in someone's day. Just ask them how their day is or tell them that they look cute, just really simple things. For me, I always try to be there for people, like, I'm the person that will stay up until 3 a.m. with you on the phone if you need it. That's what I've built my life on I guess, that's what I stand for.

Like Chloe, who is willing to endure awkward conversations and small talk just to be present for another person, and Ashley, who is willing to be a transitional friend who represents someone who will make sure you are not by yourself socially, Hannah is willing to just be there to listen and make sure you are not alone, even if it is across a phone line. These examples of being present also express and affirm Nodding's definition of caring that values genuine human encounters over abstract moral principles.[248]

Caroline, a senior, tells a story of how she reached out to a sophomore girl. "I don't really hang out with her too much but she was having a rough time at home and so I bought her, she's

[246] Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 162.
[247] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 123.
[248] Noddings, *Caring*, 175.

really into art and plants, so I got her a little succulent and we planted it together and we go water it once in awhile." Caroline provides a thoughtful gift to this girl that is tailored to her specific likes, but she also is present to the girl by planting it together and regularly watering it together.

Root's discussion of youth ministry privileges presence over influence. He critiques those ministry models that prioritize programming and influential leaders in a quest to help teens. In its place, he suggests an incarnational model, much like Jesus who was willing to become human and dwell with us. Ministry happens when people are willing to truly be there for others without judgment or agenda. Root calls this an incarnational relationship of transformation because it contains the potential for both people in the relationship to contribute and shape the relationship and to grow in God's love.[249]

Defining kindness: challenging behavior

Adults often ask teens to speak out against behaviors that aren't good for their peers. The concept of positive peer pressure is one that some teens might interpret differently than adults. When I asked Aiden about a time when he chose not to do an act of kindness he gave what sounded like a hypothetical situation, but one that teens can face often. "So, if you're drinking alcohol and I see you drinking, there are reasons I wouldn't call you out: because I know you, I don't want to set you off, or I could care less about your being healthy or not." I asked Aiden to speak more about why he would decide not to confront a friend about his behavior. "Because what we're trying to keep is a relationship with that person. If the end goal is trying to help them, you know, we might have to go through Florida to get to California." Aiden concluded this part of his story by stating his preference for leading by example instead of confrontation.

[249] Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry,* 15-17.

Aiden spoke about leading by example several times throughout his interview with me. When I asked for suggestions on how to help teens become more kind to each other, he said, "So you'd start off by, I don't know how you, you wouldn't tell your friends directly of course, it would all be by example, but it would eventually rub off on them to be kind." There is a sense with Aiden that in difficult situations where a peer is doing something they shouldn't do, the first consideration is the relationship over confrontation. As in the case of Valeria choosing not to report her suspicion that her classmate was being abused at home, a decision that adults might consider simple is complicated by adolescents who reason prosocially in different ways.

Caroline also struggles with the challenge to confront the behavior of her peers. She described a situation where her peers were talking critically about someone and she had a choice to make about how to respond.

> It's hard to stand up for yourself or for people. Like, I've been in a situation before where people, let's say they're making fun of someone and sometimes I'll be like, "Hey, you know, tone it down," or, "Let's not talk about that," but then I'm known as, "Oh, you can't talk about this around her!" or like, "She's the bad guy." Then there's sometimes where I just won't say anything. I don't want to get involved like, I just won't say anything, but I also don't walk away, you know? So as humans I feel like it's, when you're in places like those situations it's very hard to speak up and also hard to walk away and you're just kind of like, there, you're also not fully involved. At the same time it's like, I just can't do it, and I think it's more because of fear, rather than anything else.

Caroline acknowledges that one of the barriers to challenging unkind behavior is a fear of getting negative push back when you get involved. One the other hand, she does choose to confront her peers at times, and sees these difficult choices to challenge the behavior of her peers as one of the expressions of kindness.

Chapter 5. Findings – Reflections

Introduction

The narrative emphasis at the beginning of each interview invited the participants to share their own unique experiences with prosocial motivation, choice, and behavior. The subsequent interview questions invited the participants to reflect on their prosocial motivations and the motivations of their peers. This chapter discusses the findings from the interview questions that focused specifically on motivation. The organization of the chapter follows the basic structure of my interview questions and picks up where the previous chapter concluded. Chapter four covered the first two sections of the interview and chapter five covers the final two sections of the interview. The third section, Religious and Spiritual Influences, includes findings from the answers to my specific questions asking the participant to define religion and spirituality, discuss the role that religion and spirituality play in her motivation to perform acts of kindness for people outside her friend group, and discuss the role that she wishes religion and spirituality would play in her motivation. The final section, Suggestions, includes findings from the final part of the interview in which I invited the participant to share any further thoughts on kindness and to give suggestions for ways to motivate his peers to be more kind to others. In each section there are times when I include a participant's comments and stories that extend across sections because they are intertwined and provide a richer context for the original finding.

Religious and Spiritual Influences

This part of the interview invited students to reflect on possible religious and spiritual influences on their acts of kindness toward others. These reflections, added to their narratives,

confirm that there are multiple influences at work in the lives of teens who attend private religious schools. Preston, Salomon and Ritter conclude their review of religious influences on prosocial behavior by stating the following:

> Religion is a broad social institution that touches on moral, institutional, and interpersonal aspects of life, and so we should expect that different aspects of religious belief influence prosociality by different mechanisms. To conclude, the picture of religious prosociality is rich and complex, and at first glance may seem to be too unclear to understand. But taking a step back, some things come into focus. Religion is interwoven with many different domains of life: personal, family, and institutional components that shape the effects of religion by personal, cognitive, and social forces. The multitude of connections between prosociality and religion in by [sic] different forces demonstrates the importance of morality as a dominant theme that pervades numerous domains of religious belief and practice.[250]

Participants in this study provided definitions of religion and spirituality and contextual examples of ways in which those constructs have influenced their prosocial behavior. In this section I show examples of student definitions of religion and spirituality, student accounts of how religion and spirituality influence their prosocial behavior, and student comments on how they wish religion and spirituality would influence their prosocial behavior.

Definitions of religion and spirituality

One of my key interview questions asks students to describe the role that religion and spirituality play in influencing or motivating them to perform acts of kindness toward those who are outside their friend groups. After several interviews, I realized that I wanted more clarity on how the participants understood the concepts of religion and spirituality. Starting with the ninth interview I consistently asked students to define, in their own words, religion and spirituality. I

[250] Jesse Lee Preston, Erika Salomon, and Ryan S. Ritter, "Religious Prosociality: Personal, Cognitive, and Social Factors," in *Religion, Personality, and Social Behavior*, ed. Vassilis Saroglou (Hoboken, NJ: Psychology Press, 2013), 164. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=1323297.

happened to ask this question in a follow-up form during interviews seven and eight so the responses to this question come from 15 of the 21 total interviews.

The 15 students who defined religion and spirituality gave a number of interesting and unique answers but there were several concepts that showed density and deserve some discussion. In seven of the definitions of religion, students used words like rules, commandments, practices, and lifestyle. In eight of the definitions of religion, students used words like beliefs, teachings, and what the faith community studies. In eight of the definitions of spirituality, students used words like relationship with God, connection with God, and the one you believe in with your heart and soul. This indicates that a fair number of students in my sample see religion as behavior and belief centered and spirituality as more individual and relationship centered. This fits into Li and Chow's description in which religion is generally seen as adherence to specific beliefs and practices while spirituality is often seen as an openness to, searching for, and discovering the sacred.[251] A clear example of this perspective can be seen in Lucy's[252] definition when she says, "I feel like spirituality is more your relationship with God personally whereas religion is more like the stuff you do and the rules you follow to display your relationship with God."

Three of the students talked about religion and spirituality as being the same or very close to each other but two of them qualified their answers to describe religion as centered on belief and spirituality as centered on a relationship with God. Mason wrestles with how to describe their interrelatedness. It's as if he feels they are too close to separate but in some way they are different:

[251] Li and Chow, "Religiosity/Spirituality," 150-151.
[252] All participant names and some narrative details have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

> To me, they're both pretty much the same, cuz in Christianity the religion is like a relationship and if you have that you are spiritual. So I kind of see them, not as the same, but really close. As for religion, it's, I guess, more like church and the Bible, so a little more physical. And spiritual is more like your specific relationship with God, but in Christianity it seems almost the same, it's all like one thing with God.

David describes the difference between religion and spirituality as follows: "I would say the difference between both is that religion kind of involves other people and accepting your journey with other people while spirituality is more of your own personal journey with God."

The variety of definitions for religion and spirituality include a rich tapestry of perspectives. Several views shared by participants were unique and insightful for those who work with teens in religious contexts. For example, Ryan talks about how religion has both a negative and positive aspect to it: "When I think religion I think denominations, going to church, religious differences, and people fighting over little things like that. But it's not all negative for me either, I think there's a lot of good to religion like the fellowship of people coming together, sharing common beliefs, and things like that." A teen like Ryan, who perceives both the positive and negative elements of a concept such as religion, reminds us that adolescents possess and are developing the ability to critique social institutions.

Ryan continued his discussion of religion by giving examples from his religious experience of church pastors who have modeled kindness, fellowship, and unity compared with pastors who have shown the more legalistic and divisive side of religion. He gave an analysis of his approach:

> Pastors are kind of either hot or cold, you know, it's either about the rules or it's about the love. It's kind of unfortunate but sometimes it can be hard not to be that way and they may not realize that they're being that way. But, I also think because I've grown up in California, I have a pretty liberal view of Christianity so I'm probably biased in a way, but I still try to be balanced as far as trying to see both sides at least.

Ammerman's study of religious influence in daily life discovered that many people who separate religion from spirituality are also "engaged in a boundary-maintaining discourse that seeks to distance themselves from forms of religion they reject."[253] Ryan did not describe himself as "spiritual but not religious," but his strong critique of rules-based religion could lead him to distance himself from the churches in his community that lack a loving atmosphere even as he maintains his commitment to Jesus.[254] For the time being, Ryan appears to be negotiating that process of critique from within his religious community.

Ashley describes her views on religion and spirituality in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and in a relational context. "Religion is something you do outwardly. It's like, because the Bible says I need to say kind words or do kind acts, even though I don't feel like doing it, I'll do it on the outside. But spirituality, which I relate to more, is like, because God tells me that I need to be loving, I genuinely want to do it because I love him and I love the fact that he died for me." Ashley makes this distinction between a loving relationship with God and just following the commands in the Bible. When she was young, she felt her parents shoved Christianity at her. They said that she should do all these things that Jesus says for her to do in the Bible. She said in response, "Like, I don't really even know this guy and apparently I have to do all these things because this guy told me to do it."

Ashley experienced a transformation in her religious experience when she was older and began to attend religious camps for young people. "I started seeing Christianity or the Bible as kind of separate from my family and, instead, from someone that really takes care of me. The love that he shows me – because I don't really tell my parents about the struggles I go through, like mentally or physically – it's like having someone that understands me more than my parents

[253] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 289.
[254] Barna, "'Spiritual but Not Religious.'"

and that was a really big impact for me." Ashley describes how she helps other students by being a peer counselor and she tells students her motivation is "because of the kindness that God has shown me, I would like to show kindness to you." She laughs, however, as she declares that she feels she still needs to grow: "Since I'm still in the beginning of the whole faith spectrum, I feel like, for now, it's more religion, it's more like I don't really feel like being nice to that person but I'll be nice to them because God told me so. But I feel like as I mature in my own faith I hope to immediately respond to someone in distress because I want to and because I want to be like God." The tension between the binding aspect of religious obedience and the freedom of spiritual love is not unique to adolescents. Newberg's discussion of the origins of the terms religion and spirituality sounds very much like Ashley's experience.[255]

Ashley's description of how religion and spirituality function in her motivation to perform acts of kindness reflect her desire to move from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation. Ryan, Rigby and King discuss two types of religious internalization that are helpful in understanding Ashley's experience and goals for her religious life. The authors contrast identification with introjection and show how the former represents a greater internalization of religious values while the latter is still partially motivated by external approval.[256] Ashley grew up with strong external pressure to adopt Christian values. Her own personal spiritual experience with Jesus started her journey toward internalizing Christian values but she recognizes her motivation is still mixed. Her goal is to perform acts of kindness because she truly wants to follow the example of Jesus.

[255] Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology*, 30. Newberg connects the concept of binding with religion and intrinsic motivation with spirituality.
[256] Ryan, Rigby and King. "Two Types of Religious Internalization," 586-87.

John describes religion as what you believe and practice. When asked about spirituality he paused to think for a long time. Then he said, "Spirituality is the Spirit trying to help you make decisions from the part of God that assists you with decisions. So God and the Spirit help you form a good reason, a good act of kindness." His answer, I believe, is connected to his experience of a tingling feeling whenever he believes he should help a homeless person on the street. John believes his motivation and guidance comes from the presence and activity of God in his life. Hardy and Carlo point out that when we study religious youth who describe spiritual experiences as part of their motivation, we are outside the normal domain of social science.[257] Yet, these spiritual experiences don't happen in a vacuum and all the other mechanisms of motivation become part of trying to understand what is going on.

John tells how when he was little his grandpa would describe this tingling as a way to know whether or not to help a homeless person. When I asked John to describe this tingling feeling in more detail he compared it to how one feels when they get nervous about speaking or doing something but slightly different since it is directly related to whether or not to help the person in front of you. When John first described the tingling feeling he talked about being fairly confident that this tingling guided him correctly as to whether the person asking for help actually had a need or was just trying to "scam" him and use the money for cigarettes. However, later in the interview, John expressed some conflict between his heart and his mind. He told another story of walking by a homeless person and feeling in his gut and heart that the person was genuinely in need, however, in his head he thought that the person didn't need money for food and would only spend it on drugs and cigarettes. When I asked him a follow-up question to clarify which one he believes he ought to follow, mind or heart, he gave a big sigh and said, "I

[257] Hardy and Carlo, "Religiosity and Prosocial Behaviours in Adolescence," 245.

usually follow my mind because our minds are decision making, our hearts and guts are secondary."

In these stories it seemed like John was genuinely struggling, in his development, to sort out how to utilize the motivations that come from the reasoning in the mind and the feelings in the heart and gut. In both of the avenues for decision making, I got the sense that John believes the Holy Spirit is active, it's just not always clear. Perhaps a voice that is missing in John's story is that of his parents. When he first told of helping homeless people, he described the tingling feeling with confidence and talked about opening up his wallet and giving the person "whatever cash I have." His grandpa is clearly his model for this method of deciding when and how to help homeless people. On the other hand, when he told the second story, in which his heart and mind were in conflict and he chose not to help, he said, "My heart and gut were both telling me that this person needs money, but in my head I thought, 'This person doesn't need money,' so I walked past him and caught up to my parents." One challenge that parents face when raising their children is to teach them how to be generous without being naive, especially in situations where giving money is involved. Perhaps parental influence and proximity was part of the reason why John chose not to help in this situation.

Spiritual and religious influences

This interview question specifically invited students to comment on the role religion and spirituality play in their motivation to perform acts of kindness outside their friend groups. I placed this question after the narratives in order to see how religion and spirituality get mentioned in the narratives without prompting. In some cases the narratives wove together with responses to follow-up questions or with comments in this part of the interview. In other cases the narrative stood alone without a direct connection to religious or spiritual influences. In the

course of analyzing the interviews, I identified different examples of religious and spiritual influences and created a list (see appendix C.2). The list does not exhaust all the potential ways religion and spirituality influence teens, but it does reflect the views of the participants. The influences I highlight from this part of the interview include: the Bible, the paradox of grace and works, religious reputation, conscience, Jesus' example, God's love, God's power, and respect for God's creation.

Spiritual and religious influences: the Bible

Mary describes how her motivation to perform acts of kindness comes from the teachings in the Bible that encourage giving, kindness, and the golden rule. She says, "They kind of shape my character even though I don't read the Bible all the time. In school I'm having the Bible read to me and learning new biblical lessons every day and I feel like I take stuff from that and I exhibit it in my character and it plays a role in where I go, who I talk to, what kind of things I do for other people." Mary acknowledges that she tries to do what God would do in each situation but, she says, "I don't always achieve it because, you know, we're not all perfect." She feels like she is often too busy, too distracted, or sometimes just lazy when it comes to engaging in spiritual and religious activity. Speaking of being more religiously and spiritually motivated she says, "I want it to motivate me in like, a really huge and big way! I want it to be my motivation. I wanna get up in the morning and be like, 'You know what? Yes! I want to read my Bible, I want to help somebody!' You know? I just want to be that person, but, um, life gets in the way."

Mary's eagerness to study her Bible and learn its lessons on helping others affirms Ammerman's observations in her study of adults. Many of the participants in her study referred to how spiritual practices influenced them to treat others as they would like to be treated.[258]

[258] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 58, 310.

Students like Mary may struggle to read their Bibles consistently but there are many adolescents like her, in Christian schools, who appear to have a deeper commitment to their faith than Smith and Denton's "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."[259] Adults who work with teens in Christian schools recognize the challenge of encouraging students to appreciate and use the Bible as a guide for their behavior without it becoming a burden or meaningless homework assignment.

Spiritual and religious influences: the paradox of grace and works

Ryan is a senior and discussed the role of religion and spirituality in motivating his acts of kindness by referencing the paradox of grace and works in the culture of his faith tradition.

> I tend to care a lot about what other people think of me, especially people in my religion because, unfortunately, there's a push in a lot of Christian denominations that, "You need to be good, you need to be nice," even though we're all like, "Oh, you don't need to do that to get into heaven, but you should because God wants you to do it." It's almost a paradox, but I still feel pressured to do it. But at the same time, in the spirituality side of it, I do love God and I want to do good because I want him to be pleased with me. Because I love him I do what he wants, and also because what he wants is healthy for us.

Ryan reflects the complexity of growing up with an extrinsic motivation for prosocial behavior even though the stated belief in most Christian communities is that salvation is by grace and not works. He expresses his intrinsic motivation in terms of his spiritual relationship with God that is based on love and wisdom. I appreciate that Ryan still struggles with these paradoxical influences in his life and that he is aware of them.

Mussen and Eisenberg discussed the process of extrinsic motivation becoming intrinsic as children grow older.[260] One difficulty with this process in religious communities is that some people never grow out of their extrinsic religious motivation. Their religious and spiritual experience lacks the peace of God's unconditional love and acceptance and the motivation for their behavior retains the extrinsic flavor of a punishment and reward system. Ryan, Rigby, and

[259] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-63.
[260] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring*, 29-30.

King use the term introjection to nuance the experience of a religious person who acts without obvious external persuasion but who carries the extrinsic motivation inside themselves.[261] Ashley, in her earlier narrative and Ryan, in his reflections, poignantly express how this struggle, to move from extrinsic to intrinsic spiritual motivation, can be a significant part of a Christian teenager's faith development. Parents, educators, and pastors must also struggle to work more closely through stage appropriate ways to encourage children's prosocial behavior and ought to be very cautious in the use of reward and punishment, especially when linked to spiritual values.

Spiritual and religious influences: religious reputation

Much like Ryan, Ruby struggles with the pressure to maintain a public persona as a religious person. Several generations of Ruby's family have been leaders in her faith tradition. However, she also sees value for her life if she stays focused on religious things. "So, I feel like for me, I kind of have a reputation to live up to so I want to stay focused on religious things. And I think that if I stay focused it will help my well-being. I mean, I've seen people get off track so I know the side effects if you're not keeping up with good things. So, yeah, it will help your well-being, it will help you build relationships with people and make you a good person."

Ruby's reflections show how the motivations for prosocial behavior can present as both self-centered and other-centered. A reputation for good behavior is usually seen as a positive goal but if acts of kindness are done primarily to establish this reputation, then something vital is lost and the whole situation can be seen as only self-serving. On the other hand, teens like Ruby appear to be approaching prosocial behavior from Aron and Aron's self-expansion model in which there is mutual benefit to both the recipient of kindness and the one being kind.[262] I fully

[261] Ryan, Rigby and King. "Two Types of Religious Internalization," 586.
[262] Brody et al., "Compassionate Love," 286-88.

acknowledge the danger of reputation driven behavior, but I also like to give teens the benefit of the doubt when they appear to be genuinely exploring the paradox of the self-expansion model.

Spiritual and religious influences: conscience

Landon refers to the idea of the "little voice" that many would call one's conscience. When I asked him what role he sees religion and spirituality playing in his motivation to perform acts of kindness, he said, "It's a big factor, cuz like, as a Christian, you always have that tug to be nice, to be moral, just to be a good person and a good follower. Like, you always have that little voice, just to do good stuff." Holmes and Kim-Spoon describe the divine interaction theory as one of several possible factors that help religious youth avoid at-risk behaviors. "This theory posits that individuals may create relationships with the divine in a way similar to how they build social relationships. Instead of receiving guidance and solace from other individuals within an organized religious community, the individual may develop a similar relationship with a divine other in private."[263] This theory implies more than just a conscience, however, and it appears Landon sees this voice primarily as a motivation which can function anywhere and anytime for the Christian who believes God communicates with people. On the other hand, devout teens do talk about seeking God's daily guidance much as one would consult a parent or a friend.

Spiritual and religious influences: Jesus' example

Lucy answers the question about religious and spiritual motivation for acts of kindness by differentiating between the two. Regarding religion she says, "When it comes to religion, um, I guess I've met a lot of church people who aren't very kind in general. I guess they may be stuck up, so I've always wanted to be the kind of person who's not that way and make sure I show

[263] C. Holmes and J. Kim-Spoon, "Why Are Religiousness and Spirituality Associated with Externalizing Psychopathology? A Literature Review," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 19, no. 1 (2016): 5. doi:10.1007/s10567-015-0199-1.

people what my religion can look like and not what everyone else makes it look like, or a lot of people make it look like." She sees the importance of the witness a community of faith gives to the surrounding population. At the same time she catches herself, ever so slightly, in elevating herself above everyone else. She backs away from the generalization, but holds to her passionate view that Christians who aren't kind misrepresent the religion. Her spiritual motivation focuses on the witness of Jesus. "Spirituality is probably the biggest thing that motivates me to be kind. Seeing all the things that Jesus did for other people without thinking about himself and the things that he didn't have but provided for other people makes me think, 'Well, with all the things that you do have, you should be kind and give to other people and brighten their days.'"

Mason describes the role religion and spirituality play in his motivation to perform acts of kindness by pointing to the example of Jesus. "It's something we should do because we are Christians and want to follow in his footsteps." I asked Mason to say more about what he means when he talks about following in the footsteps of Jesus. "He's always going out of his way to help people and even when people approach him he's always there with open arms and is always very kind and generous. He's never selfish. It's always about going to help others. So, I definitely can't do as much as he does but I always try to think about that." Mason holds up the high ideal of Christian love and service even though he knows he doesn't always achieve it, much like Volf's admission that even when he feels he cannot achieve the ideal, he clings to the thought that he should be able to do it.[264] Holding ideals can be part of the influence for prosocial behavior.

[264] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 7.

Spiritual and religious influences: God's love

David describes the role religion and spirituality play in his motivation to perform acts of kindness by highlighting God's love and the importance of being connected to God. "I'd say focusing on the love, having a connection with God and knowing that he loves us. Throughout all of the things through life, um, the bad or the good, knowing that God still loves us, helps me understand other people and what they're going through and to show that love to them because others have shown it to me."

David doesn't go into detail on how he actually gathers motivation from God's love, but he uses words such as focus, connection, and knowledge from experience in his description. Dean, speaking from the context of church youth ministry, points out how teens seek to love and to be loved. "Adolescents do not want to suffer, but they do desperately want to love something *worthy* of suffering, and to be so loved. The Christian story both authenticates adolescent passion and turns it inside out, redeeming, redirecting, and redefining it with a more profound Passion still: the suffering love of Jesus Christ."[265] God's love can be that object and source of love for teens.

Neuroscience explains how when we focus on someone who loves us the fear systems in our brain become less active and we open up more to others.[266] Daugherty uses this knowledge of the human brain and designs meditations that help people focus and connect with those points of love.[267] David shows awareness of the power of love to motivate him to be kind. Teens may not always understand the neurophysiology behind this motivational power, but that does not prevent them from accessing it in a positive way. Adults who work with teens can use work done

[265] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub, 2004), 2.
[266] Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*, 401.
[267] Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness,* chapter 4, Kindle.

by Daugherty, Gopin, and Rogers to help teens be more intentional in using this connection to love to increase their compassion and their acts of kindness.

Spiritual and religious influences: God's power

Hannah describes her calling to be kind to others as a gift from God and she sees the advice that she is able to share with them as coming from God's power at work in her life. "I know that the advice I give people is from God, you know, and what they need to hear. It's like God's giving me those words, like, I couldn't come up with this advice. I'm eighteen. I'm not as wise as I sound." Hannah acknowledges how God's power in her life influences her acts of kindness.

I already shared most of Anna's story so I only wish to restate her conviction that God sent her friend to cheer her during her dark time as a direct answer to prayer. Anna shared that her inspiration to pray for help came from the daily prayers that her religion teacher led in class. She is grateful for the prayer that was modeled and for the power of God's answer to her own prayer. She also turns that act of God into her courage and motivation to reach out to other kids now no matter what the situation.

I already shared John's struggle to decide between the tingling at the back of his neck and his cognitive suspicion of homeless people who are asking for money. John learned about his tingling from his grandpa and believes it is one way the spirit of God motivates him to give to someone in need.

Each of these participants describes a belief that God's power and presence in their lives gives them both the power and the guidance to do an act of kindness. Their experiences inform a theological understanding of the Holy Spirit's action in this world from the lived experience of teenagers. They see opportunities to help others as connected to how God works in them and

through them. Hardy and Carlo point out that this aspect of study is outside the normal view of social science, but it is right in line with the long tradition in Christian theology of studying how human beings are empowered by the Holy Spirit.[268] Teens like John are honest about some of the difficulties in understanding how that actually works in various situations. The gospel account of the Holy Spirit working in humans compares it to the wind. You see its power, but you can't predict or control it.[269]

Spiritual and religious influences: respect for God's creation

Camila answers my question about the role religion and spirituality play in her acts of kindness by describing a shift in her motivation from getting to heaven to respect for every one as created by God.

> So, I'm Christian, my family, I've been to private school most of my life, so it's always growing up doing acts of kindness is more like God wants you to do good so you can get to heaven kind of thing. But then it was more, now that I'm older, I understand more about it. This is my family, both in like, we're high schoolers together and like my spiritual family. Like, whether I know them or not or whether they've done wrong to me, they're still people that God's created and I want, I don't want to treat anyone that God created, badly. Just like I wouldn't want to kick a puppy or something, so, definitely it's more that I don't want to hurt his creation.

Camila's statements about learning to respect God's creation ties together the theological understanding of God as creator and the belief that all people possess human value and dignity because they are created by God. Peterson and Seligman refer to kindness as including the affective response people experience when they recognize their common humanity.[270] As Soskice points out, kindness recognizes the "kin" relationship between God and humans and between all humans with each other.[271] Many theologians have emphasized this concept of God's

[268] Hardy and Carlo, "Religiosity and Prosocial Behaviours in Adolescence," 245.
[269] John 3:8.
[270] Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 28.
[271] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 5.

creation and our shared humanity as a key motivation for treating each other with compassion and love. This is another instance where a teenager's lived experience supports and informs a current theology in the context of prosocial behavior.

Spiritual and religious influences: I wish…

Students responded to this question in two distinct ways. The first way is a personal wish for religion and spirituality to function more in their prosocial decision making. The second way is a critique of the avenues adults use for teaching and supporting adolescent prosocial behavior. Students pointed out things that worked and things that didn't work. I share a number of observations here. Later in the interview I asked for general suggestions on helping teens become more kind to others. There is some overlap with other sections of the findings but I have kept them separate to reflect the flow of the interviews. In identifying personal wishes and suggestions in the interviews I created a list (see appendix C.3). This question did not function as a primary focus of the interview but the list represents a stance toward adolescents that is willing to listen to their longings and their critiques.

Spiritual and religious influences: I wish… God was more involved

When I asked Emma about the role she wishes religion and spirituality played in her acts of kindness she immediately replied, "For it to be there more often!" She explained her statement by saying, "It's hard to believe in something that you can't see. And it's hard to believe in an almighty power who you haven't really seen and you've been through a lot, or you're going through something and it's not really feeling like he's there for you."

When I asked Lucy the same question, she wished to always be motivated by God and to respond to that motivation more often. "I guess sometimes I feel like my kindness is just motivated by making other people happy and pleasing people and then other times it's

spiritualized. So I kind of wish that it was always motivated by God and Jesus to be kind and I wish I always listened to it."

Emma and Lucy represent a clear motivation to be kind to others out of a commitment and love for Jesus. Their desire to be more active and more faithful to Jesus echoes the longings of Christian disciples throughout history. Dean and Foster talk about this discipleship mindset that seeks to love all others because of Christ's love for the disciple.[272] When adolescents begin to grow as disciples we see their spiritual growth occur alongside their social and psychological development. Adults who hear teens express longing like this can become important mentors if they are willing to take time and be an authentic caring presence in the lives of these growing teens.

Spiritual and religious influences: I wish… my motivation was more intrinsic

Valeria points out that many people help others because they feel they are obligated. She wishes to be motivated only from the heart and feels that is the biblical model.

> I've seen some spiritual people and some religious people only help people because that's what Jesus told them to do, like only do it for the brownie points, you know? And I feel like that shouldn't be an element. I feel like doing it out of your heart should be the only thing. People should pay attention to the parable of the lady who gave her everything, her one penny, and the rich guys that gave whatever, you know? Because that act of kindness shouldn't be what you're required to do, it should just flow through you.

Ryan discussed his struggle with the extrinsic motivation of you should do it and the intrinsic motivation of you want to do it. He highlights the paradox of the Christian life that balances grace that covers sin with grace that transforms the sinner. Ashley also discussed her desire to be more intrinsically motivated in her prosocial behavior. These teens are very aware of the nuances of motivation, especially when spirituality and kindness are put together. They recognize and

[272] Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life*, 125.

desire to move fully into an internally motivated relationship with God that leads naturally to acts of kindness toward others.

Spiritual and religious influences: I wish… my church would show kindness to LGBTQ students

David shared in his interview with me that he is gay and that he wishes his church would find a way to accept him and others who are LGBTQ. "Hearing my church's stance and their opinion on the LGBTQ community is very disheartening, kind of opposite of the love they emphasize. So, it's just like, I don't know how I can be a part of a community that doesn't necessarily accept me or think that I'm okay to be there." David describes in more detail how he feels the religion curriculum in his school paints LGBTQ students as hypocrites and "kind of throws hate toward a group without knowing it, but still emphasizes to love one another." David represents a group of students who love God, are active in their local church, seek to be kind to others, and yet feel like there is no place for them in their community of faith.

Spiritual and religious influences: I wish… my religion classes were more practical

Students spoke highly of their campuses and their teachers and their religion teachers but they also had insights that form a valuable critique for those of us who wish to encourage prosocial behavior in our students. Lucy wishes her religion classes were more practical, especially in terms of everyday life and relationships.

> Sometimes I feel like with my religious education it's more like, "Look at this, read this, and then turn it in," whereas it's not as practical as it could be. I wish it was more practical so that way I could see, "Oh wow, this is how like this in the Bible relates to the world around me and me showing other people Jesus or just being kind." I feel like Christian adults miss that too in their teaching. My parents will show me to do something or tell me to do something or like, teach me a biblical principle and I'm like, "Okay, great, but how does that relate to my day to day life and me being around my friends or people who aren't my friends, like, what does that mean?"

Ashley reminds all religion teachers that students have different preferences for learning and that they will be inspired by different approaches to kindness. As a senior, she realizes that

she will be going out into the world as an adult and she is beginning to notice and care about world problems in a new way. "This world is not the way it's supposed to be. There's so much poverty. There's so much evil going on in this world… I talked about it with my friends and it's like seeing things that are so 'unright' makes me want to do something 'right.'" She wishes her religion class would tackle some of these social issues, not by telling them what to do, but by showing them the problems and encouraging reflection and discussion.

> I feel like I wouldn't really want the teacher to tell me what's wrong with this world but just show me… we might live in this happy bubble where most of us can afford Christian school, or most of us can eat, and most of us can go shopping but there are people out there who don't have food, and it's not something far away like Africa or the Middle East, it's something that's right next to us and I feel like just not, like, telling them, but showing them and having them just reflect about it I feel like that will really encourage students to think more before they do anything unkind.

Masten, Morelli and Eisenberger used fMRI scans to study neural activity in participants who were shown an online game in which one person was clearly excluded during the play. The research participants then sent emails to all the players in the game and their messages to the excluded player were rated for how prosocial they were.[273] The findings included information that highly empathic individuals activated more areas of the brain involving mentalizing when witnessing social exclusion than most individuals do when witnessing others experience physical pain. The authors contend that social situation can be more complex and require more reflection and understanding before people will be moved to act.[274] Empathy is a powerful motivator for prosocial behavior but mentalizing and empathic response are not always automatic. Ashley recognizes how an intentional pedagogy for empathy and kindness can be helpful in a classroom setting.

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[273] Carrie L. Masten, Sylvia A. Morelli, and Naomi I. Eisenberger, "An fMRI Investigation of Empathy for 'Social Pain' and Subsequent Prosocial Behavior," *NeuroImage* 55, no. 1 (2011): 382. doi:10.1016/j.neuroimage.2010.11.060.
[274] Masten, Morelli, and Eisenberger, "An fMRI Investigation of Empathy," 386.

Spiritual and religious influences: I wish… my religion teachers were more relatable

Several students critiqued certain religion classes and teachers as being "by the book" and too focused on doctrine, but Alina takes a positive approach and wishes that religion teachers were more open toward students and more willing to just talk with them about life and kindness. "A lot of students don't have the social skills to have a conversation with an adult about kindness or about morals or about beliefs and stuff. They're kind of shy and they wanna stray away from topics like that cuz teenagers are kind of scared to let their feelings out and talk about things. I think that maybe if we're just open from the start, teenagers wouldn't have that problem." Alina's observation includes the impact that positive teacher-student relationships can have, especially in the role of a mentor who can, over time, help a young person develop socially and spiritually.

Spiritual and religious influences: negative case analysis

The intent and scope of this study was made clear to the students during recruitment and I did not include any specific questions that elicited a negative response to the role of religion and spirituality in students' prosocial behavior. However, several students felt strongly enough to talk about how they did not see religion or spirituality as a factor in their acts of kindness, either at present, or as a philosophical stance. I was pleased that they spoke openly about their views. I have included them in this section as part of my negative case analysis.

Chloe tells a story about kindness in which she identifies a lonely student whom she tries to befriend. "There's this one student who always seems pretty lonely and I always try to be friends with them and talk to them but it seems like most of the time they want to be isolated. But I still try to always talk to them and keep the conversation going." Chloe's motivation comes

from her experience of being shy and isolated in middle school. She says, “I just feel like I can help that person not go through what I did.”

When I ask Chloe about the role religion and spirituality play in her motivation for acts of kindness she clearly states that she doesn’t believe that they influence her.

> Personally, I don’t really think religion influences acts of kindness. I was raised to be religious but I think now I’m not religious at all, but that doesn’t stop me from being kind because I feel like it doesn’t really have anything to do with religion. It’s just morality that we’ve been taught since we were kids but I’ve always wanted to do the right thing because it feels nice when someone does something nice for you so why wouldn’t you want to do something nice for other people who might need it?

Chloe acknowledges a cultural role for the religious context she grew up in but speaks of her own morality now as a form of personal golden rule. Chloe defines religion as going to church and following the Ten Commandments but describes spirituality as having a connection with God. Since she specifically used the word religious in her earlier statement that she is not religious, I asked if spirituality played any role in her motivations. She said, “Yes, I would say I’m much more spiritual. I believe in God, I just don’t follow any specific religion, so that’s why I would say I’m not really spiritual but I definitely fit more into spirituality than religion.” My impression is that Chloe has journeyed outside her religious upbringing into a greater openness toward life and spirituality beyond the religious structure of her community and her school. Even though she acknowledges a continuing belief in God, she still expresses her motivation for kindness as separate from God and her understanding of spirituality.

When I ask Nora about religious and spiritual influences she talks about herself and two other classmates as examples of the variety of motivational influences she sees in her school. “There’s this one kid who’s like, vehemently atheist, and he’s not mean, he’s not, he’s just, ‘I’m an atheist, and I don’t want to be in a religion class and you can’t change my mind!’ And we’re like, ‘Okay, man, cool.’” Nora describes herself as more spiritual than religious, but primarily

agnostic. Her motivation for kindness comes from recognizing the values of sharing a common humanity and peace. “Religion and spirituality doesn’t have anything to do with why I’m kind. It’s not like, cuz I’m more spiritual. It’s not like, karma. It’s not like I think about that actively. It’s just like, that’s another person and it’s just, it’s just easier when people get along.” The third example Nora offers is a friend that she describes as “very very religious.”

> She goes to church every week and she sings in the choir and that’s not just like fake because her parents do it. That’s like, legitimately her religion and she’s very attached to it and I’m like, okay, good for you… I mean, cuz she’s one of the nicest people I know and I don’t think it’s a religious thing for her, I think it’s just been ingrained in her that Jesus was good so do good and so I don’t think she things about religion that often but it’s just like do good when you can, I don’t know, yeah.

Nora acknowledged she doesn’t know everything about the people around her, but in her opinion, religion and even spirituality don’t have to be a strong influence for teens to be kind to each other. Her examples fall neatly into at least three major recognizable groups: non-religious, religious, and agnostic. Christian schools and religious educators encounter all three types in their classes every year. The challenge is to affirm the perspective of each and encourage and support each in their overall motivation to be kind to each other.

Julia acknowledges the role religion and spirituality play in her acts of kindness but refers to her upbringing rather than her current situation.

> I would say it plays a big role cuz I grew up in a good home and I was always taught to be good. I would hear stories about Jesus and his kindness, so it kind of just comes naturally for me. But at the same time, right now I’m just kind of struggling with God, so I wouldn’t say that part of my life affects it too much. I don’t know, I think it’s mostly just the way I was raised, cuz I was raised to act like Jesus would.

Julia’s interaction with me is hesitant, as though sharing this with a religion teacher may not be such a good thing. It takes courage for students in a Christian school to voice their spiritual struggles and to be honest about where they see themselves in relation to God. Julia acknowledges the effect of her religious upbringing, but because she doesn’t see herself as

currently connected to God in a relationship, the motivation for her kindness comes only from the moral structure without divine power. This state of being highlights the complicated intersection of psychological mechanisms and divine activity in the lives of teenagers who question their faith but choose to retain the basic values of their faith. As a religious educator I see Julia's story as an example of why there ought to be space for students to safely wrestle with their faith without fear of being labeled as a bad person.

Caroline shared a situation in which she wanted to help but felt she couldn't follow through. She helps her school as a peer counselor but finds it difficult to help fellow students who don't believe in God. "There are people who don't, who are like questioning if God even exists, so at that point it's really hard, at least for me, to connect with them because you can't be like, "Oh, pray about it!" you know, cuz who are they going to pray to? I mean that for me is the best solution but not for them." Smith and Denton, in their study of religious youth, observe that many teens are respectful of religious differences but choose silence over constructive interreligious dialogue.[275] There is a desire on her part to help them but her comment implies that she could benefit from training in interreligious dialogue and how to assist another person out of one's faith tradition while still respecting the other person's worldview. Kujawa-Holbrook encourages communities of faith to prioritize learning the skills of interreligious dialogue and cultural competency since they don't usually occur naturally.[276] When such skills are learned and activated, the students in religious schools will not see religious differences as a barrier to kindness.

[275] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching,* 268.
[276] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders,* xxxv.

Motivations and Suggestions

In the course of both storytelling and commentary, students identified many sources of motivation for their acts of kindness. Students also talked about barriers to kindness that create challenges for them and their peers. I have chosen not to discuss the barriers teens identify as hindering their acts of kindness but I have provided a list. (see appendix C.4). The last question in the interview invited participants to share their thoughts on how to best motivate adolescents to be more kind to each other. The list of suggestions arising from these interviews provide a very interesting look at how teens see their own world and the possible approaches to making it better (see appendix C.5).

Motivations

In this section I show examples of several motivations reflected in prosocial literature, such as empathy, the golden rule, and the influence of parents. I also show one example that pushes our understanding of kindness: what appears to be a self-serving motivation.

Motivations: empathy

The situations that illustrate empathy in the participants are framed both as perspective-taking and acts that originate in a desire to help those who are experiencing things the participant has already gone through. For example, Mary described helping classmates with homework, giving compliments, and sharing medication for cramps. She described her motivation by saying, "I just wanna help because if it was me I'd want somebody to help me." Olivia reached out to two different new students and helped them get settled, find their classes, and learn the routine of the school because "I know what it was like to be the new student." Simple acts of kindness motivated by empathy.

Several students shared how experiencing social isolation and bullying made them empathetic toward other teens that they noticed were isolated. Hannah and Chloe both talked about being motivated to reach out to others because they know what it feels like to be isolated and have other students be mean to them. Chloe said, "I just feel like I can help that person not go through what I did." Chloe expanded further on how empathy can motivate her peers by sharing, "I feel like most of the motivation comes from within us. It may be that going through tough experiences might help us to be more understanding toward others and form more acts of kindness towards them." Dykstra, Cole, and Capps talk about how negative experiences can damage young people, but also how experiencing difficult times can help young people develop empathy and learn to be compassionate and kind.[277] The authors suggest that young people who are struggling through these difficult times need a picture of God as one who will protect them. That support from God can give them the assistance to become more self-aware, aware of others, and compassionate.[278]

Anna talked about helping people who are labeled as "outsiders" feel welcome because she did not enjoy being on the outside as she navigated six different schools over the course of her twelve grades. Ashley told several stories of bullying in her childhood. She describes her motivation now: "I got bullied a lot, so whenever I see someone being bullied or whenever I see someone just not being able to connect with other people, my heart really goes out to them." Ashley often chooses to befriend new or isolated students and work them into her friend group. They often move on after they feel more stable and connected, but that doesn't bother Ashley.

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[277] Robert C. Dykstra, Allan Hugh Cole, and Donald Capps, *Losers, Loners, and Rebels: The Spiritual Struggles of Boys* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 10. The authors discuss how difficult experiences in the lives of boys can lead to positive outcomes, but Chloe shows how it can be similar for girls.

[278] Dykstra, Cole, and Capps, *Losers, Loners, and Rebels*, 116-19.

David shared a story where empathy motivated him to reach out to two girls who had lost a parent to cancer. David's dad also passed away from cancer when he was little. He describes the challenge of reaching out to the girls while still respecting their privacy. "These two girls, when I was a freshman and they were in junior high, one of their parents passed away with cancer. I didn't want to pry and talk to them, but I would just say "hi," give them a smile, give them a wave every time I see them. So, it was just nice to be a friendly face to them." David also talked about reaching out this year to a fellow senior who had a parent pass away from cancer. "I was able to talk to him more about it, knowing that somebody else is going through the same experiences as you makes you want to touch them, get closer, try to share experiences, helping them get through the situation. That's the motivation I had."

Batson discusses the role empathy plays in generating prosocial behavior. He points out that merely taking the perspective of another person does not always translate into helping behavior. Empathic concern requires both understanding the need of the other and caring about their welfare.[279] The examples I shared from the interviews show students who demonstrate empathic concern, primarily because they have gone through similar experiences which help them understand the need and want to help meet that need. While their previous experiences assist in their motivation, they still must exercise a choice to value the welfare of their peers.

Motivations: golden rule

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."[280] This concept is widely known as the golden rule. Ammerman's research looked for ways in which ordinary people try to live out the golden rule and she discovered that many of them are influenced by their spiritual

[279] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 34-43.
[280] Matthew 7:12 (NIV).

practices and their religious communities.[281] The teachings in the Bible, the modeling in the community of faith, and also the natural response to the logic of treating others as you wish to be treated all contributed to golden rule behavior among the teens in my study.

When I asked Mary about the role religion and spirituality play in her motivation to be kind to others, she talked about the Bible and her community of faith as playing key roles in her motivation. Hannah described her version of the golden rule in the negative form as avoiding the behavior that caused her so much pain in the past. "People that haven't shown me kindness… I don't want to be that person for someone. I want to be on the good side of that, not the bad." Anna suggested that the golden rule might motivate the type of student who doesn't care about others.

> I feel like the way to get the message of showing kindness to everybody including those kids that act like they don't care or that they're too cool, is to have them take a moment and put themselves in the shoes of the person that's getting bullied or the person that's on the outside… or, have them think if that was your sibling, or that was your cousin, your mom, your dad, yourself, anybody, your best friend, would you like them to be alone? Why let other people talk to them in a rude manner or in other ways that can be prevented? It doesn't take too much to just take a step forward and take a stand.

Alina also emphatically claimed the golden rule as a foundation for her daily living. "I'm so stuck to my morals and my beliefs to treat people how you want to be treated and if you wouldn't want that being done to you, why would you do it to somebody else? I truly live by that, every day, for sure!"

Motivations: parents

When I asked Alina to talk about what motivates her acts of kindness she did not hesitate and emphatically declared that her mom is both her model and her teacher.

> My mom raised me to be kind, she is like the most kindest person that I could ever name on this planet! I don't say that just because she is my mom, because all the people that have met her know the type of woman she is, literally an angel. I have five siblings and

[281] Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 58, 310.

> she's taught all of us to live life the happiest that you can be and the kindest that you can be. People might not treat you with the same kindness but you will never have it on your conscience that you didn't do something good or didn't try to do something good.

Barry et al. examined the effect of the mother-child relationship on prosocial behavior and concluded that it was significant. The authors cite literature that shows several key elements of parenting that help children develop intrinsic prosocial behavior. "Specifically, parents who reason with their children, use power assertion (i.e., rule setting and enforcing), and whose parenting is done with warmth, tend to promote children's internal regulation of values (Grusec and Goodnow 1994)."[282] Alina points out that her mother "raised her" which implies active parenting with goals, boundaries, and supervision. Her mother also "taught" her and her five siblings how to be kind. But Alina also shares how her mother is the "kindest" person she knows. Alina's mother appears to have used the key elements cited by Barry et al: warmth, reason, and power assertion.

A number of the students made comments about how they believe kindness starts at home and how their own motivation to be kind comes from how they were raised at home. Caroline tells a story about how a suggestion from her dad led to a courageous act of kindness that completely transformed a difficult relationship in elementary school.

> My dad, he's one of the most religious persons I know. There was this time where there was a girl who would always be mean to me, like at recess, all the time! So then my dad was like, "Christmas is coming up, why don't you just give her a special present?" She was way older and I was like, "No, no!" I mean, I had to come up with the courage to do that but at the end of the day I did that for her and that changed everything. I mean, this girl would hug me in the hallways now and remind me, "I still have that gift," all the time. I will never forget that because that actually set my tone and my perspective in life, that, yeah, turning the other cheek really does work.

[282] Carolyn Barry et al., "The Impact of Maternal Relationship Quality on Emerging Adults' Prosocial Tendencies: Indirect Effects Via Regulation of Prosocial Values," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 37, no. 5 (2008): 582. doi:10.1007/s10964-007-9238-7.

Ashley shared how she felt frustrated growing up when her parents forced her to be kind and told her she had to be like Jesus. As she came to learn about and appreciate the love Jesus has for her she found motivation to give kindness to others because she has received kindness from God. However, she still comments on her ongoing struggle with extrinsic parental pressure to do right, "I want them to be proud of me and I want them to feel like they really did a good job raising their daughter, and I feel like sometimes when I'm around my parents I'm a little more kind to other people, the words I use and things I do for them." Ashley's parents are active in helping others and bring her along when they sing for residents in a senior home or buy and distribute food to people without homes or shelter. Commenting on this activity, Ashley says, "Most of the time it's like, 'Ohhh, let me go, I don't want to do this,' but I hope that later on, as I become an adult, I will be like, 'I want to do it because I want to."

Motivations: self-serving

Several participants shared stories of acts of kindness that appear to be both other-centered and self-centered. Brown's work on the adolescent social world shows how many of the social decisions teens make depend on achieving various social goals. This can be seen as a self-serving motivation. Olivia, a junior, talks about how she has been reaching out to new kids this year because most of her friend group are seniors and will be gone next year. "A lot of my friends are seniors and I know that next year I might have some struggles with my friends… so I think maybe reaching out to the new kids is also possibly the idea of meeting a new friend. That way there would be a few more friends in my class." It didn't appear that Olivia was in any way insincere in her friendliness toward new students, however, she recognized that it was to her social advantage to make some new friends since so many of her current ones would be gone next year. Olivia recognizes her mixed motives and later in the interview she differentiates

between prosocial behavior and selfish behavior. "I feel like a lot of times people tend to be kind of selfish in the fact that it's not going to directly benefit me, so I don't need to do something if it doesn't directly benefit me. But in the long run maybe it will." Olivia appears to be the kind of person who would help others even if it didn't benefit her, but she also finds motivation and satisfaction in doing things that benefit both herself and others.

Prosocial motivation need not be limited to being either selfish or selfless. When considering motivation in prosocial behavior it is helpful to understand Batson's argument for the very existence of altruism over and against egoism which excludes any possibility of altruism. Batson points out that the strong version of psychological hedonism explains all human action as motivated by egoistic personal pleasure thus negating any possibility for altruism. However, Batson argues that the weak version of psychological hedonism allows for a human to gain some personal pleasure from the completion of the larger goal of helping someone else.[283] This understanding allows teens to perform acts of kindness for others that represent a prosocial motivation but that also includes an internal reward of satisfaction when the prosocial goal is both engaged and completed.

Camila shares how her passion for musical theater translates into acts of kindness that benefit younger kids and her own pride in her program. She says, "Regardless of if they're my friend or not, I will always help out, like, especially with the younger kids, cuz we have kids from theater schools who come help us, so if they don't know the choreography, I'll go over it with them." When I asked Camila about what motivates her to help out in rehearsals, she laughed and first said, "I want the scene to look good! I don't want a bunch of kids milling about the stage!" Then she continued, "But another part of it is I want them to have a passion about theater

[283] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 20-22.

and I don't want them to think that just because they can't do this little thing right they're never gonna be good at it."

Camila is also aware of her own internal struggle to always want something in return for what she gives to others. When I asked her how she wishes religion and spirituality would influence her acts of kindness she described her struggle: "Religion has always motivated me to be a better person and everything, but then, well, so as a teenager when you feel you don't get the things you want you kind of blame God. So I guess in the selfish part of me, I wish that when I did acts of kindness I wish I would get things back sometimes. I'm sure I am getting things back I just don't always realize that I am." I asked her more specifically if she wished to increase her capacity to perform acts of kindness without expecting return and she said, "Yeah." I was curious what she wished for in return for performing acts of kindness and she said the following: "I guess like any teenager, less stress, good grades… also things like I wish my parents didn't get mad at me for something so little, or I wish my friend and I didn't get into this fight, so it's more of I wish I didn't have negative energy around me when I do sometimes."

Brody et al. use Aron and Aron's self-expansion model to address situations in which a prosocial behavior can be interpreted as both selfish and selfless.[284] In cases where a teen chooses to reach out in kindness, one can see how the act is kind toward the other person but also contributes to the sense of self for the one being kind. Caroline is a senior who sees her acts of kindness as part of who she is and who she tries to be. "I would say that people consider me a kind hearted person. I, I hate like, complimenting myself, but I mean, I do try to be that person." Caroline recently recommitted her life to God because she felt that she had been just going through the motions. She sees her acts of kindness as part of that renewed connection and

[284] Brody et al., "Compassionate Love," 286-88.

identity as a Christian and part of the motivation includes how it makes her feel. “I wanted more of a connection and I feel like I connect with him more when I do an act of kindness. It’s kind of like, ‘You know, thank you God, for placing this person in my life,’ or, for noticing them in time to make their day a little better or even just like a little smile. It’s just a connection that I feel with God. Like I feel at peace in the moment.”

When I asked Alina to tell a story of an act of kindness, she chose to describe her journey in varsity sports support. One of her teachers was also a coach and he asked her to be on the crew that takes care of equipment, water, and other activities supporting the athletes. At first she declined but then decided to give it a try. She was the only freshman on the crew since none of her friends joined her at the time. Her growth into this role gave her opportunities to lead, help, and inspire others.

> That was like the first time that I was ever alone in a situation, the first time I ever did something by myself and that is, for sure, without a doubt, the best decision I ever made. It brought so much light in my life. It brought so much happiness! I got to take care of these athletes that I truly cared for because they were my friends… It set me up for college. It set me up with internships and it made me figure out what I want to do for my career in life. So, I want to be a sports medicine physician and take care of athletes.

Clearly, Alina has benefitted from the experience she gained on the support crew, however, she chose to help others and the experience grew her in a positive way. She expanded herself while embracing the larger role of being a helping person and caring leader. As a senior, she was head of the support crew and she understood the importance of being a role model and inspiring others to take the job of supporting athletes seriously. “I was the head of the support crew and I had to delegate a lot of things and I had to be a role model to the younger girls that were coming in.” She tells how at the end of this season, she was recognized by her coaches as doing an excellent job and transforming the reputation of varsity support into something that more students now want to join and apply for leadership roles. In some ways, when people grow and develop

through a role that includes acts of kindness, there is the possibility that they might do it only for the benefit to themselves. On the other hand, there are many vocations in life that people choose which center around helping others and yet include the personal rewards of growing as an individual. Alina's plans to enter sports medicine in the future show how this trajectory can be a powerful inspiration for one's entire life.

Suggestions

At the end of the interviews students were invited to give suggestions for how to best motivate and influence their peers to be more kind to each other. I wanted to make sure each participant had a final chance to say what was on her mind or in his heart. By this time most students felt very comfortable sharing their opinions with me and many spoke candidly about a wide variety of areas of concern. In this last set of findings I draw primarily on these suggestions but occasionally I draw from earlier statements and narratives. The suggestions are organized into four related categories: model kindness and caring, create opportunities for acts of kindness, share testimonies, and teach kindness.

Suggestions: model kindness and caring

Ryan spoke at length about the importance of both the church and pastors modeling kindness to their members. Adolescents like Ryan, who grow up in the church, notice how people are treated by the congregation. "God wants us to do well but if we mess up, he says, 'It's okay, you can try again,' but the members of my church don't really give second chances, but if they do they hardly ever give a third chance." Ryan suggests that we ought to be more forgiving and encouraging to people who struggle. "I feel as Christians we should be a little more forgiving. We care about what they do but we should care about the good things they do and congratulate people and say, 'Hey, I'm glad you did that, sounds like you helped out that person.

I understand you were like this in the past but I forgive you now because that's what God wants, that's what God would do."

Ryan continued discussing the impact of the church community on his understanding and motivation for kindness by highlighting a couple of his pastors. "I've had a couple of really good pastors try to help me out with problems that I have and I feel like that's a huge act of kindness on their part. Because not only is it their job but they genuinely care about me and my person and my health as well as everyone else." Ryan contrasts this with examples of pastors who emphasize the church program and rules at the expense of loving their members. "Pastors are kind of, for me they're either hot or cold, you know, it's either about the rules or it's about the love. Sometimes it can be hard not to be that way and they may not realize that they're being that way."

Multiple students talked about how their parents modeled kindness and were instrumental in teaching them to be kind. Earlier in this chapter I shared how Alina emphatically declared that her mom is both her model and her teacher. Alina also recognizes that other adults at school fill a role similar to parents in modeling kindness for adolescents.

> I just believe it's your parents, like my mom and my grandpa, they were the number one people that taught me to be who I am today and why I am the way I am and why I think the ways I think. I think also the second one would be teachers, administrators, the secondhand people, your co-workers, your bosses, they play a huge part in your life. You sometimes see them more than your family. I think that teachers play a big role in people's lives and my coaches, they're like family to me because of the things they taught me.

Hannah speaks about the impact her teachers had on her. "I honestly like just how much the teachers care and how much my faith has been able to grow and stuff like that, you know, I don't know if I would have still had my faith throughout high school if I wasn't here."

Noddings emphasizes the power of adults in the educational setting to model caring in the many ways that they interact with their students. She cites Buber's foundational argument that humans ought to treat each other as fellow humans rather than as objects or means to an end. Noddings argues that when teachers treat students in caring and humanizing ways, in even the smallest interactions, they model caring and inspire their students to care for others in a way far more effective than any lecture.[285] As we can see from Alina and Ryan's comments, Noddings' observations can apply outside the classroom as well as in all the places where adults have interaction and influence with teens.

Lucy talks about how she believes that peers need to model kindness to each other because leading by example influences young people. "I think that motivating your peers you can just do kind things and they'll see you doing that and see the impact it has on other people and even on them and they'll be like, "Wow, I want to do that too." Lucy also sees peer modeling to include inviting others to join you. "Even like just saying, "Okay, today I'm going to do this," and then asking people, "Can you help me?" and then including them in that activity. It helps them feel like, "Wow, this is what it looks like!" and they feel a part of something cuz not everybody feels like they have a worth or a purpose so that gives them purpose and then they're like, "Wow!" It brightens their day, someone else's day, happy for everyone!"

Brown et al. discuss the many characteristics and variables of adolescent peer influence. Several key factors that contribute to effective peer influence include the dynamics of the peer relationship and "an individual's opportunity and capacity to enact the behavior."[286] Lucy's

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[285] Noddings, *Caring*, 186-201.

[286] B. B. Brown et al., "A Comprehensive Conceptualization of the Peer Influence Process in Adolescence," in *Peer Influence Processes Among Youth*, eds. M. J. Prinstein and K. Dodge (New York: Guildford Publications, 2008), 12. https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259980858_Brown_B_B_Bakken_J_P_Ameringer_S_W_Mahon_S_D_2008_A_comprehensive_conceptualization_of_the

suggestion shows her understanding of the power of opportunity. Instead of just telling her peers to be more kind, Lucy envisions modeling kindness in ways that create opportunities for others to join her. When one is already kind toward others, this adds the positive relational dynamic that makes it more appealing for others to join the activity.

Alina looked back over her four years at her school and realized how much she appreciated the caring atmosphere. She specifically notes how the students care for each other.

> We have good kids! We have a lot of good children that fight for what they believe in and fight for what they believe is right. They have people's backs when, you know, not other people do. Even when a teacher is wrongfully accusing a student of something, we have a hundred students saying, "No, no, no, you're okay, you have us!" I definitely appreciate that at this school our students are very family like.

Earlier in this chapter I shared more details from the stories of Emma and Hannah, both of whom credit teachers with a transformational level of caring in their lives. In Emma's story, a caring adult recognized a student in need and willingly went above and beyond the regular job description. In Hannah's story, she came from a school where she was bullied and she found a caring campus at her new school where the teachers looked out for students and worked to strengthen their belief in themselves and their faith in God. If students respond to adult and peer modeling of kindness, then those acts of kindness can be a catalyst for creating more acts of kindness among the student community.

Suggestions: create opportunities for acts of kindness

Mary points out the importance of getting to know people outside one's friend group. It all starts with interaction. "Obviously we wanna stay inside our social group, we don't wanna leave and I feel like we have to break that some way. If we can have more interaction with each other and realize there's more people that you can talk to… I feel like if teenagers were more

_peer_influence_process_in_adolescence_In_M_J_Prinstein_K_Dodge_Eds_Peer_influence_processes_among_youth_New_Y/link/55cb76a008aeb975674c7b59/download.

willing to hang out with people and have experiences then they would be more to like, share their experiences and be kind to others."

Nora describes a fun day on campus that her school plans for the student body. Students are randomly divided up throughout the day to interact with each other doing fun and silly activities. Nora sees this as really valuable time to make new friendships and gain a sense of school spirit and community. Her critique is that they should plan it at the beginning of the school year rather than at the end. "If you had those activities at the beginning of the year, when people are looking to make friends, then it would foster friendship and community. Then if you have that group to start off the year and you network and find other friends in your classes then that's good, all the more friends you can lean on and have to support you."

Caroline's school plans two events for students intentionally designed for students to mix and get closer with each other. One event is at the beginning of the year and the other is at the end of the year. Caroline thinks they should have more events like this planned throughout the year. "At the end of the year vespers, everyone exhales and works to get along and the year ends strong. I mean, it's great to see that but from the beginning to the end, during that whole time, we don't have anything like that." Caroline says that she and her classmates have talked to teachers about having more events but so far it hasn't been approved. She recognizes that when a school prioritizes creating activities that bring students together, good things happen. "I think it'd be good to have that because at like the end it's like, "Whoa!" the environment at school is way different than it is throughout the school year." When teachers plan events like this it can be hit and miss sometimes, but when students give direct feedback that something works and they want more of it, it might be wise to listen to them and empower student leaders to move forward.

Several participants talked about being involved in a job on campus or holding a leadership position on a team or in a club. They saw their role as a leader creating opportunities for kindness toward students. Camila started managing a sport just for credit but it led to genuine opportunities for kindness. "I'm managing a sport this year and at first it was just to get my PE credit but afterwards I started actually helping… One student collapsed on the field and I went over to him and helped him get to his feet. I pulled him to the grass and I'm like, 'Are you okay? Let me get you water or food or something!' That's what started the friendship. I think that's an act of kindness." One could argue that rather than kindness, Camila was just doing her job, but as an adolescent she is learning how to do jobs well and how one can do a job just to do it or do it with genuine caring and compassion. When students are able to come together around a shared sense of something larger than themselves, they can exercise leadership, compassion, and true kindness toward those who are with them.

Ruby has been on several mission trips and suggests that teens be given more practical community service opportunities. "Maybe like, more involvement with your community, cuz I feel like, if you go to a retirement home and help out there, that's being kind, right, cuz you're helping people." Ruby values hands on activities and feels that when teens can experience helping others it will lead to doing more of the same kinds of acts of kindness. Ruby critiques the stereotypical youth event as just talk and no action. "Maybe bringing in more activities to show kindness, cuz usually people just do vespers or bible studies and you're not really doing anything kind. Usually at vespers, you eat, you play a game, you listen to people talk, and you go home."

Mason suggests that schools require students to do it first and that will inspire them to do similar acts on their own. "I almost think a way to get my peers to be more kind is to force them to do it at first… I think that with my class it would work and eventually they would start to see

what it does and how fun it can actually be and they'd start doing more on their own after that." Siu, Shek, and Law call what Mason suggests the "foot-in-the-door" approach. The authors argue that even though students are required to perform prosocial acts they will grow to internalize the values of the behavior.[287] However, those of us who work with teens know that this approach can backfire and create resentment instead of acceptance and internalization. There is a fine balance in how adults in power use that power to create experiences for young people that are positive and not manipulative. As a religious educator I have seen the most success with the "foot-in-the-door" approach when the adults have good existing relationships with students, the activities are given a solid rationale and good scaffolding, and there is a meaningful and honest debrief afterwards.

Suggestions: share testimonies

When I asked Caroline for suggestions on how to motivate teens to be more kind she talked about the impact of personal testimonies. "I think hearing testimonies from other people would be kind of neat cuz it's kind of like they're living proof." She described how she had a chance to share with her class her story of giving a Christmas present to the girl who was bullying her and how turning the other cheek transformed their situation into a positive one. "My class was just kind of like, "Oh wow!" They were in shock. Not all the people know I was bullied when I was in grade school. I think it really opens the eyes of people." Earlier in this chapter I told the stories Emma and Hannah who both shared their testimonies in school-wide chapels and immediately found opportunities to help students who responded to their testimonies.

[287] Siu, Shek, and Law, "Prosocial Norms," 2-3.

John suggests that parent testimonies impact their children. “Their parents can tell them stories on specific events that happened in their lives and how they show kindness to people. And their children can follow what they did in that story.” Earlier in the interview, John shared what his grandpa told him about how he decides to give money to homeless people. “When I was little, my grandpa used to tell me that when he sees homeless people on the streets and they come up to him and ask him for money, if his heart or gut tingles he will give them money, if not, he won’t give them anything.”

Ruby commented on the role preaching plays in motivating teens to be more kind. She didn’t specifically mention testimony but she felt that pastors need to preach more relevant and relatable sermons. “I feel like pastors kind of focus their sermons toward adults because usually you’ll see teenagers just sitting there completely zoned out. They don’t know what’s going on. So I feel like you should make your sermon approachable for everyone.” She also points out the value of being positive rather than negative. “I think pastors sometimes tell teens, ‘Don’t do this! Don’t do that! You’re doing this wrong! You need to do this!’ So they’re telling you dos and don’ts instead of ‘you could do this and you should do this, cuz it will help you.’ Or, ‘This would be a nice thing to do.’” Rogers points to the power of stories in the lives of teens and highlights the importance of teaching teens to identify the negative cultural stories in their lives and create and tell stories that positively impact their lives.[288] Teens can recognize and appreciate relevant life-affirming stories when their peers share them and when the adults in their churches and schools share them.

[288] Rogers, *Finding God*, 112.

Suggestions: teach kindness

There are many ways we can teach kindness to teens, but one powerful theme I hear from many of the participants is the realization that God can use you to help others. Students like Emma, who believe that God used another person to show kindness to them, find motivation in the belief that God can also use them to show kindness to others. Hannah believes that God is using her to help others but her perspective reframes the difficult experiences in her life as ways God is preparing her to help others.

> I'll go through a super hard time that I did not think I was going to get out of, you know, and then like, three months later, a friend of mine is going through a hard time and I can use my experiences to help them or even talk them off the ledge. And it's like I sit back and realize that God put me through this so I can help this person with this, you know, and it's like all these bad times have been so God can use me. I think that's super encouraging like, okay like, it's not because he doesn't love me and it's not because he's not there, which are all thoughts that have gone across my head, it's so I can be his tool here on earth, you know, to help other people.

Valeria suggests that we teach teens respect for all people. She believes mutual respect can transcend differences. "I feel like respect is definitely what we need because if we respect each other, no matter our morals, if our morals differ, if our foundation differs because we're from two different cultures, then as long as we have that mutual respect, then it's not gonna be so hard." Ryan suggests that we teach teens how being kind can make you healthier and happier.

> I've read it several places in my psychology textbook that being nice and thinking positively can help you tremendously. I thought I'd try it out! So started with just saying "Hi" to people when I see them, just being, "Hey, how you doing?" you know, just being friendly and not just walking by. It has really helped me a lot… when I'm nice and try my best to genuinely care about people and how they're feeling and what they think and what they're doing, it's nice to see how they react and for whatever reason it makes me feel better, makes me feel healthier. It's kind of like God, he wants us to do certain things, cuz I think overall it's healthy for us and that's why he wants it for us, he wants us to feel good and healthy.

Ultimately, teens have ideas about what they think their peers should learn about kindness. They also have ideas about how to teach those ideas. Perhaps with a cooperative

paradigm of education, adults and teens can learn together through action and reflection how to inspire more people in our world to be kind to those outside their friend groups.

Chapter 6. Interpretations

Introduction

Teens are showing kindness to each other! In a time when we hear so many heartbreaking stories about adolescent antisocial behavior, it has been so encouraging to sit down and listen to teenagers describe a variety of ways in which they reach out to their peers outside their friend groups. Each student who volunteered for this study shared with me the unique ways he experiences kindness, shares kindness, and what motivates him to be kind. I wish I could include all of the examples from each interview, but for the sake of this study I have selected stories and thoughts that have opened my eyes to new ways of understanding my role as one who wishes to encourage and support teens in the context of religious education.

In my analysis of the interviews and findings, four major themes emerged as areas in which religious and spiritual influences contribute to adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. These themes are presence, modeling, resources, and education. In this section I will use Osmer's framework for practical theological interpretation and discuss each theme by asking four basic questions: "What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?"[289] Each theme contains several unique expressions that reflect the particular experiences and thoughts of the participants and also lead to suggestions for religious educators and parents.

Theme: Presence

Presence is the willingness to be with another person in a caring, attentive, and supportive role. God's loving presence in some adolescents' lives represents a significant motivation to be

[289] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.

present in the lives of others, even those who are outside one's friend group. Adults and peers can also be present to teens in ways that are interpreted as God's providence. Communities of faith can nurture kindness as presence in the lives of adolescents by prioritizing a comprehensive theology of presence in the church, Christian school, and home.

Presence: What is going on?

We expect adolescents to show kindness to family members and close friends. Teens are also more likely to show kindness to peers that they like and respect.[290] I was both surprised and encouraged by the stories that participants told of taking the extra step of showing kindness through presence to peers that were on the social margins. In Anna and Lucy's[291] stories, the kindness they showed was rejected or ignored and yet they both found compassionate ways to be persistently present for the other teen. Lucy chose to say "hi" to a quiet and isolated student every day even though she got no response. At the end of the school year she discovered that the girl she greeted every day was deeply appreciative. Anna chose to reach out to a girl who was also quiet and isolated. Her initial attempt at friendship was rejected but she patiently waited until she sensed another opportunity. Together with her friend group, Anna gently coaxed her peer into a comfortable friendship. Peers can deeply impact each other with a ministry of presence.

We expect adults who work with adolescents in school and church settings to show kindness toward teens. The demands of teaching on a high school campus often include trying to teach over 150 students a day and grade papers and do lesson planning. Teachers who spend extra time attending to very specific needs of certain students are going beyond what is usually

[290] Eisenberg, *The Caring Child*, 139.
[291] All participant names and some narrative details have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

expected of them. Emma's story illustrates how a staff member can show kindness through presence toward a student in a way that both helps and inspires the student. Mr. Wilson was present for Emma by listening to her story of trauma at home, giving her time and a safe space in his office, assisting her with food and transportation, and framing this kindness in the teachings and practices of the Bible. Emma described the impact of this ministry of presence by saying, "It's huge how amazing a man he is. He is one of the people I trust with anything in my life. And I want to be that person for someone else, and not just one other person but for many people." Emma related how she found opportunities to be present for many others after she shared her testimony in a school-wide chapel.

> So I spoke for chapel and I shared my experiences growing up with an abuser and how it affected me and a lot of kids reached out saying, "Hey, like, I'm going through some things sometimes too at home." Like, kids have reached out so we all go and get in a car and we just talk. Whatever is in the car stays in the car, it doesn't leave. We call them car talks. So we just talk to each other, kids talking to kids.

Adults can deeply impact and motivate students with a ministry of presence which can, in turn, motivate students to reach out to each other with a ministry of presence.

Presence: Why is this going on?

The purpose of this study is to better understand how religion and spirituality influence adolescents to reach out in the ways just described as acts of kindness through presence. David locates and describes his motivation as coming from the loving presence of God. "I'd say focusing on the love, having a connection with God and knowing that he loves us. Throughout all of the things through life, the bad or the good, knowing that God still loves us, helps me understand other people and what they're going through and to show that love to them because others have shown it to me." God's loving presence, experienced as a mental and spiritual connection, can motivate adolescents to show the same ministry of presence to other teens.

In Anna's story, God's presence took the definite form of a peer who shared kindness through presence with her. When Anna was going through a difficult time in her life she was very sad and isolated. Her classmate, who wasn't a close friend, chose to reach out to her every day and try to make her smile and laugh. Anna describes this experience as an answer to prayer and a catalyst for her own choices to reach out to other isolated peers.

> At that time, when I had all that weight on my shoulders, I actually cried and started praying and I just prayed for a sign, prayed for help. Then when my other friend somehow came into my life, little did I know that God sent my friend to "Make her smile at least once. Make her laugh." I saw that, me crying for help, it was answered. I was being heard. So I feel like I can go up to God whenever I'm in any sort of distress, even if I'm happy or sad, any emotion, and I can do anything with him by my side or watching over me. That inspires me to go out there. I'd rather be the first student to take the first step because there's nothing wrong being kind to others, even if it's a person nobody likes, might as well reach out, this is high school.

God's presence, experienced through another person who shares kindness through presence, can motivate and strengthen adolescents to reach out with similar kindness to others.

Presence: What ought to be going on?

The teens who told their stories about the powerful impact of presence open up a significant dialogue between the Christian theology of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the actual practice of presence in Christian communities. Root critiques the traditional model of church-based youth ministry as a strategy of influence which, even when successful, can divide young people into ingroups and outgroups. In contrast, he presents an incarnational approach to youth ministry. "The incarnation is not about influence but accompaniment. It is not about getting us right but bearing what is wrong with us, so that we might find that we are only right in the embrace of a God who loves so much to be with us!"[292] School-based youth ministry can benefit from the same critique. Academic achievement often divides students and teaching

[292] Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*, 79.

strategies of achievement and competition can undercut attempts by religious schools to foster a caring community. It seems wise to approach all aspects of youth ministry, church and school, with an intentional focus on being truly present with each other as Jesus is present with us.

The willingness of the interview participants to show kindness through presence to peers who do not possess high social status opens up another significant dialogue with the interstitial witness of Jesus and his followers. Destro and Pesce explain this unique social witness:

> Thus, Jesus's relationship with people was a direct, face-to-face one. It was his presence that, in the course of each meeting, acted as a catalyst as well as a modifier of various forces: it brought about change, the "suspension of relational networks" in households and workplaces. Conventional, standard roles were discontinued. This suspension opened up the opportunity for every individual to have a direct relationship with Jesus. It was an unusual type of relationship in the light of typical household and labor conditions; it impacted the role played by individuals where they lived and fulfilled their respective functions.[293]

This type of interstitial witness challenges contemporary Christian communities to examine their hierarchies and social divisions. This witness also challenges schools to critique authoritative administrations, teacher-centered classrooms, and rigid adolescent social hierarchies. It seems wise to be more present with each other by embracing the interstitial witness of Jesus in our schools and churches.

Presence: How might we respond?

The pragmatic task tempts me to rush ahead with action plans based on what I have learned in my research. How might we best respond to this knowledge that God's presence can motivate teens to become present in each other's lives? Peterson, in his days as a pastor, recalls getting impatient when he would try to help people grow as Christians. After trying his own methods of helping people change he realized he ought to first see what God was already doing in their lives. "More often than not I found myself getting in the way of what the Holy Spirit had

[293] Destro and Pesce, "In and Out of the House," 301.

been doing long before I arrived on the scene, so I would go back, feeling a bit chastised, to my proper work: Scripture and prayer; prayer and Scripture."[294] In this particular case of responding to God's presence in the lives of adolescents, I take Peterson's experience as a strong suggestion to continue to listen first to the teens in each community to see what God is already doing in their lives through his presence. Complimenting that respectful stance, adults working with teens could learn to see God's presence and activity in the world together as a joint adventure. Mr. Wilson's presence in Emma's life was accompanied by invitations for her and other students to seek God's presence through scripture and prayer.

A community-wide response to the importance of kindness through presence could be to work to decenter the dominant forms of achievement and competition in the activities that make up so much of an adolescent's social world. Clark observes the pervasive nature of competition as it shapes children. "Today, even very young children learn that they are only as valuable as their ability to contribute. Rarely are youth activities, especially group activities such as sports and dance, safe places that allow children to explore latent potential, develop appreciation for a sport or activity, or even simply enjoy being involved."[295] Competition and the value of certain types of achievement have their place, but communities such as schools can begin to prioritize presence, accompaniment, and involvement in creative ways both in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. Students may very well be leading the way already if we observe them, listen to them, and ask them to be part of the process of planning.

[294] Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (20th Anniversary ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 196.
[295] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 31.

Theme: Modeling

Modeling is the representation of kindness in ways that are relevant, significant, and inspiring. God's example of kindness motivates teens to replicate that example in how they treat others, even those who are outside their friend groups. Adults and peers can also model kindness through their deeds and testimonies. Religious schools and churches may model kindness through religious symbolism, stories, and events. Communities of faith can encourage kindness in the lives of adolescents by comprehensively integrating what is said about kindness with what is actually performed as kindness.

Modeling: What is going on?

Imitating the examples we see around us begins at the very earliest ages of life. Adolescents are influenced by modeling in a number of ways, including peer pressure, social norms, and exposure to opportunities for behavior.[296] I found it ironic that in my "narrative" study, I was surprised by the stories my participants told about the impact their public testimony had on their peers. Hannah and Emma publicly shared their personal stories of how kindness shown to them helped them deal with trauma. After they shared their personal stories their peers responded by seeking them out for help. Caroline shared her personal story of how her act of kindness toward a bully transformed their relationship and her peers appreciated her willingness to be open to them and give her testimony publicly. She said, "My class was just kind of like, 'Oh wow!' They were in shock. Not all the people know I was bullied when I was in grade school. I think it really opens the eyes of people." Narrative modeling can be powerful, but in my

[296] B. B. Brown and C. Klute, "Cliques, Crowds, and Friendships," in *Handbook of Adolescent Development,* eds. G. R. Adams and M. Berzonsky (London: Blackwell, 2003), 336. https://web.archive.org/web/20191202015529/https://prsg.education.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Brown-Klute-2003-Friendships-cliques-crowds.pdf.

experience as a pastor and religious educator, I have found the use of personal testimony to be problematic at times and underappreciated at other times. Such opportunities for public testimony ought to be handled with careful planning that creates a generous atmosphere of respect and openness. I appreciated the positive impact of students and adults willing to share their experiences as a model for others.

Parental modeling is one of the strongest influences, for good or bad, on adolescent prosocial behavior.[297] John's story about his grandpa helping homeless people and Alina's declaration that her mother is "the most kindest person that I could ever name on this planet," are examples showing that those who raise us at home help shape our attitudes and behaviors toward kindness. Ashley's mixed experience with her parents reminds us that no parent is perfect and parental instruction and modeling can be complicated. Even though Ashley didn't like how her parents forced her to accompany them to perform acts of kindness, she still retains an appreciation for what they were doing for others. She recognizes that the extrinsic motivation her parents employed still influences her picture of God and her decisions to be kind but she wants to continue her growth toward intrinsic motivation. "Since I'm still in the beginning of the whole faith spectrum I feel like, for now, it's more religion. It's more like I don't really feel like being nice to that person but I'll be nice to them because God told me so. But I feel like as I mature in my own faith I hope to immediately respond to someone in distress because I want to and because I want to be like God."

Adolescents notice and appreciate the positive modeling by other adults in their schools and churches. Alina credits her coaches with teaching her how to care for athletes and lead a team's support crew with a kind and firm hand. "I think that teachers play a big role in people's

[297] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring*, 74-100.

lives – and my coaches, they're like family to me because of the things they taught me." Ryan appreciates the positive example that several pastors have shown him at his local church. However, Ryan also critiques the adult members of his church for showing a negative model of judgment instead of a positive model of kindness. "God wants us to do well but if we mess up, he says, 'It's okay, you can try again,' but the members of my church don't really give second chances, but if they do they hardly ever give a third chance." The teens in this study notice the examples that the adults in their world set for them. They appreciate the positive modeling and critique the negative modeling.

Adolescents are used to hearing instructions on how to behave or how not to behave from the adults in their lives. Aiden discussed the difficulties of when peers try to instruct each other and emphasized the importance of leading by example. Rather than confront a friend and risk injuring the relationship, Aiden suggested supporting the friend but leading by example. He says, "So you'd start off by, I don't know how you, you wouldn't tell your friends directly of course, it would all be by example, but it would eventually rub off on them to be kind." Peer modeling can vary in its impact but the relational context of adolescent prosocial decision making is a priority.

Modeling: Why is this going on?

Adolescents like Mason and Lucy talked about how the example of Jesus motivated them to perform acts of kindness. Understanding what Jesus did for others made them think about how they could do things for others as well. Jesus does not represent a random adult to Mason or Lucy, but rather, one with whom they have a faith-based and spiritual relationship. Lucy says, "Spirituality is probably the biggest thing that motivates me to be kind. Seeing all the things that Jesus did for other people without thinking about himself and the things that he didn't have but provided for other people makes me think, 'Well, with all the things that you do have, you

should be kind and give to other people and brighten their days.'" Mason locates his motivation for being kind in his identity as a Christian. "It's something we should do because we are Christians and want to follow in his footsteps."

The influence that one person has on another can stem from a number of factors, but Barry and Wentzel identify two influential elements of friendship. They point to "affective quality and interaction frequency," as key factors in peer influence.[298] Anna's story of her classmate, who reached out to her every day in kindness, shows how frequency with warmth and caring influenced her to do the same for others. Aiden's description of leading by example also relies on the quality of the relationship to influence one's peers. The affective quality of the relationship at home impacts the parental model as well.[299]

Testimonies and practical examples from real life can create a positive influence for teens because they are practical and they are from real life. A testimony shows that a behavior can actually happen. Caroline explains why she thinks testimonies are so powerful when she says, "I think hearing testimonies from other people would be kind of neat cuz it's kind of like they're living proof." A testimony creates a vision of what can be and, in the stories of Emma and Hannah, gave a chance for teens to connect with someone who could help them from personal experience.

Peers and adults can also influence teens to perform acts of kindness by modeling kindness and inviting someone to do it with them. This opens up an opportunity that the teen might not have seen before the invitation. Lucy describes how she sees this working. "Even just saying, 'Okay, today I'm going to do this,' and then asking people, 'Can you help me?' and then including them in that activity. It helps them feel like, 'Wow, this is what it looks like!' and they

[298] Barry and Wentzel, "Friend Influence," 161.
[299] Mussen and Eisenberg, *Roots of Caring*, 74-100.

feel a part of something cuz not everybody feels like they have a worth or a purpose so that gives them purpose and then they're like, 'Wow!' It brightens their day, someone else's day, happy for everyone!"

Modeling: What ought to be going on?

These examples of how modeling can impact teen prosocial behavior highlights the importance of authentic Christian witness. Jesus clearly states the task. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."[300] Jesus provides an example of love that extends across social groups to even include our enemies.[301] Volf acknowledges that while we may fail at times to love like Jesus, the motivation and vision of such love is a vital part of the Christian hope and identity.[302] Students can benefit from both the vision of kindness that Jesus holds high before us and the deep forgiveness and grace that Jesus extends to us no matter how low we find ourselves. When kindness is modeled in the Christian community, Jesus is present in a tangible way. Like Emma says, "But I think that when people show you kindness, it's him trying to say, 'Hey, I'm still here for you, lookit, I sent this person who is showing you kindness, who is showing you love, who is showing that they care for you. I'm here always and forever, like, please don't let go of me.'" When kindness is not modeled in the Christian community, teens interpret this as hypocritical and, even though they love their church, they can be frustrated and hurt by the church. Some disagreement and conflict is unavoidable in a Christian community, but in the crucible of such situations, the degree to which kindness is a true priority is revealed.

The stories that participants told of how teachers and coaches have modeled kindness for them also creates a high standard for those of us who work with large groups of teens and who

[300] John 15:12 (NIV).
[301] Matthew 5:44 (NIV).
[302] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 7.

have many competing tasks to accomplish. Noddings lays out an agenda for teachers that prioritizes a caring environment in which students learn, not just by content, but by process and modeling. "If what we do instructionally achieves the instructional end – A learns X – we have succeeded instructionally but, if A hates X and his teacher as a result, we have failed educationally. A is not 'better' as a result of our and his efforts. He can receive neither the teacher nor the subject as one-caring… He must be aware always that for me he is more important, more valuable, than the subject."[303]

bell hooks pushes the concept of a teacher modeling kindness to include both standing with a student and showing a student how to do things differently. "Psychoanalyst Alice Miller used the term 'enlightened witness' to refer to that person who stands with someone being abused and offers them a different model of interaction. Caring teachers are always enlightened witnesses for our students. Since our task is to nurture their academic growth, we are called to serve them."[304] Noddings and hooks both challenge the community of faith to make kindness and caring clear priorities in all that we do so that our model of kindness positively impacts adolescents both in receiving kindness and in learning to be kind.

Rogers worked with teens to understand the role of stories in their culture and in their own ability to imagine a better world.[305] Just as personal testimonies open up new ways of seeing the world for the teens who hear and connect with them, storytelling, dramatic arts, and music can enhance a positive and inspirational model of kindness. Rogers' work reminds us that a critical consciousness is vital for understanding and discerning the life affirming narratives from those that have a negative impact on society and teens.[306]

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[303] Noddings, *Caring*, 172.
[304] bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 89.
[305] Rogers, *Finding God*, 105.
[306] Rogers, *Finding God*, 105.

Modeling: How might we respond?

Religious communities usually have curricula in the church and the school that focus on Jesus, both his love for us and how we ought to love each other. Some communities lose that focus among a number of other topics that seem important. One practical step for modeling kindness in our communities is to clearly prioritize how scripture instructs and inspires us to love others. If Jesus valued love as the greatest commandment, then we can show teens how everything else can be understood through the lens of that priority.[307]

However, instruction alone cannot provide the most effective motivation. Religious communities can comprehensively model kindness in the way that each person, in their sphere of influence, treats people. This challenges teachers to not just be kind but to examine their pedagogy and classroom management strategies to see how structural changes can create a better model of kindness. This challenges school administrators to look at both their personal interactions with staff and students and also the policies and hidden curriculum that drive the school culture and atmosphere. This also challenges parents to reflect on how they treat their children even as they instruct them to be kind to others. A religious community could prioritize kindness and then work together – church, home, and school – to learn, model, and support acts of kindness.

Another practical approach to encouraging kindness is to use the form of modeling present in narrative, both personal testimonies and constructive stories that create possibilities and hope for students. As long as students have enough autonomy to shape the nature of their personal testimony, schools and churches can encourage a positive culture of storytelling that

[307] Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV).

will show what can happen through kindness. Faculty and pastors can also show how testimony itself can be an act of kindness.

A final practical suggestion is for adults to prioritize mentoring students into positions of responsibility and leadership and showing them how to lead and work with kindness. Alina was able to see her responsibility to train and challenge the other members of her varsity team support crew as an exercise in kindness. Work and leadership are complicated contexts for adults to understand how to show kindness. Adolescents would benefit if their education and training included modeling kindness in these areas.

Theme: Resources

Resources are those elements of social capital that empower adolescents to reach out and perform acts of kindness for others, especially those outside their friend groups. God's power functions as both a resource and a motivator for acts of kindness. Everyday acts of kindness, a sense of belonging, and simple opportunities to connect with others can be resources that create new resources of kindness in the teens that experience them. Specific resources for particular needs, such as mental health concerns, can also inspire teens to care for others who have similar needs. Communities of faith can prioritize making social capital available and accessible to students and encouraging and supporting efforts by teens to provide peer support for each other.

Resources: What is going on?

Acts of kindness can take the form of resources for the many challenges teens face each day. One type of resource that emerged in several of the interviews was providing support and help for mental health issues. When Hannah arrived at her current school she was coming from a school where she had been bullied and she was struggling with self-harming behaviors. The two

biggest resources in her recovery and in her motivation to help others were the caring faculty and staff at her new school and the caring medical professionals at the local treatment center. In turn, she found the courage to give her testimony in order to be a resource for others. She says, "For me, that was why I got over my anxieties and got up there and did that because even if there was just one person in that room that needed to hear what I had to say, then I feel accomplished, I did what I needed to do."

Lucy shared how her friend group recognized that several among them have mental health issues and so they look out for each other each day. They have become a peer resource group for each other. Lucy described the caring by saying, "A lot of us struggle with mental health, so checking in means like, 'are you okay?'... 'what's going on?'... and if they're not okay, telling a teacher, 'Hey, they need a moment.' So just like kind of being there for each other." Lucy also chose to be a resource for a student outside her friend group who was having mental health issues. She baked her some cookies and left them with an anonymous note to brighten her day after she had a breakdown.

Resources can also be perceived by teens in how friendly their school is and how many social activities are available to bring people together. Caroline told the story of her senior class deciding that they would be nicer to the underclassmen and less cliquish now that they were in their last year. Individual teens can be a resource for others, but when a large group of teens chooses, together, to change culture to be more kind toward everyone, that is really encouraging. Caroline describes her class by saying, "Our class is so laid back and so chill and it's kind of like, we'll talk with anyone, we'll invite anyone. I feel our class just isn't intimidating and we've heard that before, like, 'You guys are so easy to get along with!'" Seniors can set the tone on a campus for a whole year and sometimes for years to come.

Alina describes how she and her friends decided as brand new freshmen not to join cliques or be exclusive in their behavior. They said, "We're going to be friends with everyone, our little group." Her little group also joined ASB, which was not cool at the time, and decided to make it fun for everyone. She says, "And now, everybody wants to do ASB cuz they finally realized it's the cool thing to do. I hate that phrase, 'Oh, that's not cool to do,' or, 'That is cool to do.' Everything's cool if you make it cool." Students like Alina and her friends can transform parts of school culture from resource-less to resource-ful.

Resources: Why is this going on?

The ultimate resource in a Christian community is the power of God. Hannah points to God's power as the source of the wise counsel she is able to give her peers. Anna draws on God's power to be the courageous one who will reach out to unpopular students and stand up to bullies. John acknowledges that he doesn't always understand how God's guidance works, but he believes that it is an important part of what motivates his acts of kindness. These students who see God's power as their resource are able to turn around and be a resource for others.

In many of the stories the participants shared with me, resources shared with them turned into resources shared with others. Schools where adults provide resources for students increase student engagement and school connectedness.[308] When teens find resources at their schools, they tend to add to those resources for others.[309] Social capital is one of those positive energies that multiplies with use. Sometimes the social capital that impacts students comes from outside the campus, as in the case of Hannah and the treatment center, and it helps a student be an initiator on campus. Social capital can influence adolescents through trusting and supportive

[308] Kidron and Osher, "Research on Prosocial Education," 64.
[309] Cartland, Ruch-Ross, and Henry, "Feeling at Home," 305, 318.

relationships at church as well.[310] The nature of social capital appears to be that if people invest relationally in others, the capital grows and the profit is shared.

Pickering's ethnographic research in the Balkans shows how weak links between divided groups can lead to peaceful and cooperative relationships. These weak links are everyday opportunities to interact in helpful ways with each other.[311] Nora describes a fun day on her campus that gives students opportunities to form these weak links. Sadly, according to Nora, this fun day is at the end of the year rather than at the beginning when those weak links can become social capital for the rest of the school year. Caroline also discusses how her school plans spiritual events at the beginning and end of each year that give opportunities for students to connect, form friendships, repair friendships, and increase the resources of kindness. She wishes her school did these events more often throughout the year.

Resources: What ought to be going on?

A Christian theology of the church finds one of its most powerful metaphors in the Apostle Paul's description of each member of the community belonging to Christ's body.[312] Volf explores this metaphor in the context of how we relate to each other, especially when we have differences that divide us. The invitation is to see all the members of the community as interrelated and in need of each other, yet remaining distinct individuals with appropriate personal boundaries and identities.[313] The teens who told stories about how resources played an important role in their experience and motivation for acts of kindness provide another important point of dialogue for theology and practice. Hannah's story shows her coming to a new school as a student dealing with the trauma of recently divorced parents, bullying, and self-harm. On the

[310] King and Furrow, "Religion as a Resource," 709.
[311] Pickering, *Peacebuilding,* 166.
[312] 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.
[313] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 7.

one hand, the school was caring, kind, and helpful. However, on the other hand, Hannah shared that for the first year she was there, she felt like she was the only one in her Christian school who had problems. She said, "When I first came here in eighth grade, it's like, I'm the only one with issues, like everyone has it perfect here. And it's a Christian school, everyone's great, everyone's happy, everyone has the perfect family, and like, my parents are newly divorced and I self-harm." Her own testimony in chapel as a senior appears to have broken the silence for other students who felt isolated in their struggles. A religious community ought to value sharing resources with each other, but perhaps our schools and churches should also seek ways to be more open about brokenness and suffering and work to remove the stigma often associated with mental health and social issues.

Adolescence is clearly an important stage of development in many areas of the whole person. The social development of teens is a critical part of that development. Bolling cites numerous studies which highlight the damage that social exclusion creates for young people.

> Adolescence represents a period of significant neural, behavioral, and social development (Blakemore, 2008; Coleman & Hendry, 1999; Giedd, Blumenthal, Jeffries, Castellanos, Liu, Zijdenbos, Paus, Evans & Rapoport, 1999; Steinberg, 2005). During this period, as relationships of primary importance shift from parents to peers, interactions with peers become especially salient (Spear, 2000; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Coupled with this rise in salience of peer relationships is an increased sensitivity to peer exclusion (Rudolph & Hammen, 1999; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Social exclusion has been shown to elicit a host of negative psychological effects, including increases in self-deflating behavior and externalizing behavior problems (Laird, Jordan, Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 2001; Twenge, Catanese & Baumeister, 2002), decreases in prosocial behavior and general mental health (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco & Bartels, 2007; Rigby, 2000), and increases in social avoidance and depression (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Gazelle & Rudolph, 2004). Thus, it follows that the nature of peer relationships in adolescence would make this phase of development one of heightened sensitivity to the negative effects of exclusion.[314]

[314] Danielle Z. Bolling et al., "Development of Neural Systems for Processing Social Exclusion from Childhood to Adolescence," author manuscript, Yale Child Study Center, Yale University (2011): 1-2. https://web.archive.org/web/20191202012310/https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4457505/.

Therefore, we can see why prioritizing the positive effects of social capital for adolescents and pulling together as many resources as possible ought to be a major imperative for all who work with teens in religious communities. The stories told by participants about how social capital worked to help them recover from experiences of social trauma and exclusion are inspirational for those of us who work with teens and want to encourage and support them.

Not all of the stories told to me by the participants ended well. Mary's story about the clique of girls who were friendly toward her but who didn't want her in their friend group reveals another significant challenge for religious communities who wish to be like the body of Christ. Kamitsuka discusses problems of inclusion and exclusion involving white and womanist feminist scholars. She quotes Spelman who points out that "'[t]he power to include implies the power to exclude.'"[315] In Mary's case, she realized that this group never really intended to include her, but she also sensed that their use of power wasn't healthy for her either. Power to include and exclude in religious communities can be located in any number of places, official or unofficial. The challenge for such communities is to transform relationships from the fixed use and abuse of power to the flexible and generous adaptation and sharing of power. If we are to truly be the body of Christ, then all of the parts ought to surrender to Christ and follow his example of love. Love is a resource that can multiply as it is shared and that can transform relationships stuck in a power struggle for inclusion and exclusion.

Resources: How might we respond?

There are several practical responses that schools and churches can make when considering the role of social capital in motivating teens to be kind to each other. One of the most obvious ones is to prioritize creating opportunities for adults to become resources for teens

[315] Kamitsuka, and AAR, *Feminist Theology*, 11.

by connecting with them in attentive and caring ways. Resource-ful churches and schools often create activities and small groups where adults and teens can mix, work together, play together, and create and share social capital. Sometimes other priorities can shrink these opportunities or let them die on the vine for lack of support. In addition to the more formal opportunities to connect, adults can find simple and everyday ways to care, connect, and show kindness to teens in their sphere of influence.

Another response suggested by several of the participants is to increase the activities at school and church where teens can meet each other and form relationships that can grow. Brody et al. point out that the classroom is a place where certain planned activities with randomly paired students can achieve different levels of relationship that can serve as social capital.[316] Planning these activities to fit within curriculum or within a busy school calendar may seem difficult but if the priority is to increase the resources for student well-being, then it seems worth the effort.

A final suggestion for religious communities is to work to increase resources for mental health and work to change the negative perception of those dealing with mental health issues. Hannah was thankful that the treatment center she received help from was located close to her home. She realized that many teens who need that level of care either cannot get it or must get treatment far away from home. Working to take away the stigma of mental health issues could involve working to change the very structure of how students are valued and seen on campus. Since Christian schools seek to help students grow in all the areas of their lives, the temptation is for the school and its students to portray themselves as problem free – like Hannah first perceived her new school. "It's a Christian school, everyone's great, everyone's happy, everyone

[316] Brody et al., "Compassionate Love," 302.

has the perfect family." Embracing brokenness, valuing everyone equally regardless of achievement, prioritizing love over status – sounds a lot like how Paul describes the body of Christ.

Theme: Education

Education is creating a safe and inspirational space where intrinsically motivated kindness can be experienced and learned through action and reflection. God's guidance provides prosocial motivation and knowledge through the teachings of Jesus and through experience and reflection. Teachers can assist students in understanding how their social brain works and how to develop it in ways that lead to acts of kindness. Teachers can also encourage students to learn by experience, reflection, and leadership. Communities of faith, especially schools, can rethink education as primarily about information and prioritize caring and kindness as both visible and hidden curriculum.

Education: What is going on?

Education is always more than just imparting knowledge. Several of the participants built their motivation to be kind to others on biblical teachings and the principles of a relationship with God. Mary talked about how encountering the Bible in class each day helped shape her character. She said, "In school I'm having the Bible read to me and learning new bible lessons every day and I feel like I take stuff from that and I exhibit it in my character and it plays a role in where I go, who I talk to, what kind of things I do for other people." Emma described how Mr. Wilson related the teachings in the Bible to social challenges and she felt it encouraged her personally and impacted the entire student body. The Bible teaches kindness and many of the students I interviewed understood basic biblical prosocial principles.

Christian education also seeks to help students gain experiential knowledge of Jesus. This experiential knowledge can inspire them to follow Jesus because they want to, not because someone else told them to. Ashley's story illuminates the struggle teens can experience trying to move from extrinsically motivated religion to an intrinsically motivated religion. Her parents taught her to obey Jesus, but her educational experience at religious camps for teens taught her that Jesus loves her and facilitated her experience of that love. This experiential knowledge of Jesus' kindness motivates Ashley intrinsically. She tells other teens she helps through peer counseling, "because of the kindness that God has shown me, I would like to show kindness to you." Ashley still struggles between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation but she has the desire and the goal to continue performing acts of kindness because she genuinely wants to follow God's example.

One kind of education that happens outside of the classroom is life experience. Adolescents bring to their understanding of kindness their own background experiences and what they have learned from them. Chloe says, "I feel like most of the motivation comes from within us. It may be that going through tough experiences might help us be more understanding toward others and form more acts of kindness toward them." This life experience and personal perspective can produce some complicated decisions. When Valeria chose not to report a fellow classmate who she suspected was being abused at home, her reasoning came from her own experiences involving social services and the difficulties that arise from involving them. Her motivation was kindness toward this student and her reasoning came from her own unique experience.

Education: Why is this going on?

Ashley makes a suggestion for religion teachers to show more than tell, especially when it comes to motivating acts of kindness. When she is able to see a social problem in the world it activates her empathy and gives her a chance to reflect and look for solutions to problems. She says that "seeing things that are so 'unright' makes me want to do something 'right.'" Masten, Morelli, and Eisenberger's study using fMRI scans of the brain showed that the regions of the brain, that researchers call the social brain, became activated when the research participants observed social exclusion and felt empathy.[317] In real life situations empathy can motivate students to reach out and be kind to each other. David's story about reaching out to two of his peers who lost a parent was motivated by empathy as he had also lost his dad when he was younger. Many of the participants shared stories that included empathy as part of their motivation. Whether someone shows you or you take the time to notice others in need, that opportunity to see another's need gives empathy a chance to motivate you to be kind.

Ryan and Deci show how their self-determination theory works in the educational setting to increase the development of intrinsically motivated behavior. Students tend to make values and behaviors their own when relatedness, competence, and autonomy are all present in the learning environment. Take away any one of the three key elements and it becomes more difficult for students to develop intrinsic motivation.[318] When this framework is active in religious education students can learn to adopt the values of kindness toward their peers as their own. Several participants emphasized the importance of teachers who are caring, open minded, and able to teach through example and practical insights. Several participants also wished that the adults in their lives would not take away their autonomy by forcing religion on them or

[317] Masten, Morelli, and Eisenberger, "An fMRI Investigation of Empathy," 381-82.
[318] Ryan and Deci, "Self-Determination Theory," 76.

restricting the opportunities for students to question religious teachings. When teachers are able to relate to students, teach practical competence, and encourage and support autonomy, students can develop the intrinsic motivation to be kind to others.

Difficult experiences can help us understand others but they can also help us grow and understand ourselves as well. Dykstra, Cole, and Capps draw on their own experiences of growing up as boys in their work on spirituality in boys. They conclude that spiritual growth in boys can come from negative experiences as well as positive ones. "Simply put, our thesis is that the spirituality of early adolescent boys is more likely to issue from experiences the boy considers negative than from experiences he considers positive."[319] The challenge for parents and educators is to know when to let life experience teach and when and how to intervene because the life experience is too dangerous or harmful.

In all of these insights on why education impacts student prosocial behavior, the religious context includes space for God's guidance to work in and through the lives of adolescents. Students like Hannah and John refer to God's guidance as central to their decisions to perform acts of kindness. Mary talks about guidance from the teachings in the Bible. Landon describes the role of God's guidance through his conscience. Students can learn from God on their own but they can also learn together, in community, how to understand God's word. Pastors, teachers, and parents play an important role in providing space for God to communicate directly with adolescents while still sharing wisdom from life experience and the faith tradition.

[319] Dykstra, Cole, and Capps, *Losers, Loners, and Rebels*, 10.

Education: What ought to be going on?

The very reason for the existence of many Christian schools is to educate young people about God's love and how to love others. Noddings argues passionately about the need for all schools, secular and religious, to teach people how to truly care for each other.

> Sometimes, a writer acknowledges the supreme importance of both human domains but assigns their nurturance to separate institutions. Thus, the school trains the intelligence, and the home and church train for morality and emotional well-being. We must reject this view emphatically. It is not that these functions cannot be separated theoretically. It is, rather, that the human being who is an integral composite of qualities in several domains is thereby shaped into something less than fully human by the process. The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring.[320]

When Noddings explains her model of education she pushes the idea of putting "every educational effort" into grading, discipline, curriculum, modeling, and how teachers encounter and relate to students. Students watch and learn. Students also watch and judge. Religious education ought to integrate content about caring with "every educational effort" to actually be caring.

Day describes his research with over 500 adolescents and young adults in which the participants were asked to write one page narratives of times when they used religion to address a moral dilemma. The participants were also measured in moral judgment, religious judgment, and cognitive complexity stages.[321] Day points out that Piaget's "formal operations" were only developed into mid and late adolescence and not by all.[322] Additionally, Day's findings showed a very high correspondence between the participants' ability to handle complex moral thinking and

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[320] Noddings, *Caring*, 172.
[321] James M. Day, "Narrative, Postformal Cognition, and Religious Belief," in *Religious Stories We Live By: Narrative Approaches in Theology and Religious Studies*, eds. Reinder Ruard Ganzevoort, Maaike De Haardt, and Michael Scherer-Rath, 33-53 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 37. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/9789004264069_004.
[322] Day, "Narrative," 39-40.

the application of multiple perspectives in addressing the actual moral dilemmas they experienced.[323] Thus, adolescence is a prime time for moral development.

> *With greater capacity for complexity in cognition, comes greater inclination to apply this capacity in the working out of real-life problems, and a greater sensitivity to the perspectives, needs, and concerns of others. Higher orders of cognitive complexity represent expanded resources for narrating, imagining, and understanding the moral and religious experience of others, and for ways of affirming religious conviction whilst listening to perspectives from alternative frameworks of belief, symbol systems, and religious practice*.[324]

Education cannot just tell students what they should know and what they should do. Day's research shows that increases in socio-moral cognition leads to the ability to perform acts of kindness in the complex arena of the real world. Religious education ought to exercise the cognitive functions of the social brain through specific pedagogical strategies. These strategies that reflect the current research on the adolescent brain and learning impact all teaching but are especially valuable for the religious classroom.

The overarching structure of our Western educational system favors competition over cooperation. Eisenberg shows a counter example from the Aitutaki when she discusses subsistence cultures.

> If a fisherman caught more fish than his family could use that day, he would 'store the surplus in his neighbor's belly.' Then he and his family could expect a constant supply of fresh fish through gifts from his neighbors. In this manner, 'a network of mutual obligation, caring, and concern is formed throughout the village.' In contrast, in Western urban settings, children frequently are encouraged to do better than their peers and to do their homework alone. Test scores and college entrance tests tend to be based on the individual child's performance relative to the performance of peers. . . family survival rarely depends on children's contributions to the family, and children seldom perform chores that make important contributions to the well-being of the family.[325]

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[323] Day, "Narrative," 45-46.
[324] Day, "Narrative," 46.
[325] Eisenberg, *The Caring Child*, 79.

The religious communities in which I did my research don't exhibit a subsistence culture. However, the Aitutaki principles of mutual obligation, caring, and concern match key principles in the Bible and challenge religious educational communities to rethink the role and nature of competition in academics. Schools seek to prepare students for success in the "real world" but perhaps we should prepare students to change the real world by changing our educational world to be more caring.

Education: How might we respond?

Communities that wish to help their young people develop prosocially must take the first fundamental step of making the care and education of their young people a major priority. Teens recognize when the adults around them are attentive and care about them and their world. Adults recognize when leaders and policy makers mean business rather than just paying lip service to initiatives designed to help youth grow and develop. Character education programs can work in schools but usually only when embraced school-wide and implemented well.[326] The church, church school, and the home can partner together to prioritize the prosocial education of adolescents.

In addition to prioritizing prosocial education, schools can involve students in planning and implementing prosocial initiatives. This could take the form of creating a culture of participatory action research (PAR). Ryan and Deci point to autonomy and competence as two of the three key elements contributing to intrinsic motivation.[327] The process of PAR equips and empowers the subjects of research as the ones who author and implement their findings.[328] Informally and formally, schools can invest students with real leadership roles that empower

[326] Vincent and Grove, "A Primer," 128.
[327] Ryan and Deci, "Self-Determination Theory," 68.
[328] Durand and Lykes, "Think Globally," 249.

them to impact policy, curriculum, activities, and school culture. This research has attempted to give adolescents a voice to share with us what kindness looks like in their social world. PAR seeks to take the next step and empower teens to listen to each other and use action and reflection to initiate ways to influence their peers to be more kind.

Perhaps a final response might be to recognize the many students across campuses who, like the 21 who volunteered to talk with me, are already catalysts for kindness in their schools. Recognizing and supporting what they are doing and what God is doing through them may very well be a critical step leading others to follow their lead to spread resources of kindness.

Future Research

This study sought to give a voice to teens to better understand how they are influenced and motivated to reach out to their peers who are outside their friend groups. The findings are primarily intended for adults who work with teens. Future research must consider how to empower adolescents to do prosocial research and to use the findings in creative and relevant ways. The methodology of participatory action research can make this possible on the local high school campus. If school administrators and teachers are willing to prioritize prosocial cross-group interaction, then they ought to train, support, and empower groups of students on their campuses to do participatory action research with the goal of initiating real social change.

Two participants in this study told stories of prosocial cross-group interaction through social media. Future qualitative research ought to focus on how teens understand kindness online, how the motivations and expressions of kindness on social media are different than in person, and how prosocial behavior on campus is enhanced or diminished by prosocial behavior online.

This study looked primarily at students who valued kindness from a Christian worldview. Future studies could focus on students who value kindness from other religious worldviews. These studies could use samples that are relatively homogeneous or seek religious diversity. In the spirit of interreligious learning and dialogue, these studies ought to be designed to contribute wisdom for the common good of teens rather than for comparison and evaluation. Future research could also expand the diversity of the sample to include non-religious teens as well.

This study encountered a number of stories that revealed teenagers who made a journey from experiencing social trauma to performing cross-group acts of kindness. Future narrative research could bring the lens even closer to look specifically at the lives and stories of students who are able to make the journey from trauma to prosociality.

Finally, this study was a step forward to add more qualitative data to this important topic of adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. More real life qualitative data is needed to continue adding depth and nuance to how we understand prosocial behavior. Specifically, future studies ought to provide more ethnographic data utilizing a variety of sources and more narrative data with smaller samples and more narratives over time. Each young person is unique and yet teens share many things in common as they navigate this stage of life called adolescence. This marvelous group of people are interesting, capable, and dynamic. Their acts of kindness can inspire young and old if we but give them the attention, respect, and support they deserve.

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Appendix A.1: Institutional Review Board Proposal Plan

Robert Skoretz
Claremont School of Theology
IRB Research Plan

1. Date: January 31, 2019
2. Project Title: Religious and Spiritual Influences in Adolescent Prosocial Cross-Group Interactions: A Qualitative Study Among Students in Christian Secondary Schools
3. Researcher: Robert Skoretz. Practical Theology, Education and Formation
4. Project Period: March 4, 2019 - June 30, 2019
5. Funding: Self-funded
6. Research objectives: A central prosocial value in the Christian tradition is that we treat others with love, compassion, and caring. Those who work with adolescents in Christian communities seek ways to encourage and support teens in developing prosocial behavior toward both their friends and others outside their social groups. This research proposal asks the following questions: What are the religious and spiritual influences that motivate adolescents to behave prosocially toward their peers who are outside their social groups? How do those influences operate in the complex and dynamic social world of adolescence? What can we learn about cross-group interactions from the stories of students who walk the halls of Christian high schools? The narrative approach aims to address these questions in the context of lived experience and to give voice to adolescents in contributing to a study of their social world.
7. Literature Addressing Risks: Samuel Lee points out that narrative interviews create a time period of intentional listening in which pseudo-intimacy can develop. The role of the researcher is to be aware of this possibility, steer interviews toward understanding rather than empathy, and avoid any semblance of advice or quasi-therapy.[329] Rose Wiles describes how sometimes interviewees can respond emotionally when a project is coming to an end.[330] This project plans for only one 50 minute interview per participant with the possibility of a brief follow up conversation for clarification. Necessary steps will be taken to keep the interview conversations professional and appropriate.

   As an adult who will be interviewing adolescents in a school setting, my role as a researcher is to be aware of the power imbalance both perceived and real. Rather than asking questions in an instructive manner, Kathy Charmaz, suggests prefacing questions

[329] Samuel Lee, Lecture for "Research Methods in Practical Theology," February 17, 2015.
[330] Rose Wiles, *What Are Qualitative Research Ethics?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 58.

with, "May I ask you," allowing a student to consider whether or not they wish to answer the question.[331]

If not already required by school personnel, it is always recommended that another responsible adult be nearby when interviewing adolescents.[332] Therefore, my interviews will be located in an area where office staff or faculty are present and aware of the interviews.

Interviewees will be asked to tell stories about prosocial cross-group interactions but the stories may include elements of anti-social behavior and social difficulty. Additionally, stories and follow up questions will likely include the sharing of religious and spiritual experiences and beliefs. These topics could potentially create emotional responses of discomfort. The invitation to participate in the interviews and the consent forms will clearly describe the purpose of the interview, the topics to be covered, and the nature of the questions. Each interviewee will be invited to pause or discontinue the interview at any time. All interviews will be kept confidential throughout the gathering and publishing of the data.[333]

8. Participant Population: The population for this research project will be 20-30 students in the 10th-12th grades recruited from local Christian high schools in the Inland Empire. I will attempt to recruit a sample that is generally balanced among six primary high schools (Aquinas High School, Arrowhead Christian Academy, Bethel Christian High School, Ontario Christian High School, La Sierra Academy and Woodcrest Christian), although there are more possible schools in the area if needed to reach my sample size. My plans for recruitment, once I receive approval from each school's administration and the religion teachers, is to visit religion classes to briefly describe the project and make an invitation to participate. I will give each student a small handout with my email address and instructions for students interested in participating to discuss it with their parent and have their parent email me requesting the informed consent form. I will offer a $15 gift card in appreciation for participating in the interview. I will give the card at the beginning of the interview and the student may keep it regardless of completing the interview.
9. Consent: Attached Informed Consent Form for Parents; Informed Consent Form for Students. A conversation with each secondary school's site administrator to secure permission to do research on their campus will precede any action on the campus. I will

[331] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2014), chap. 3, Kindle.
[332] "Esomar World Research Codes and Guidelines: Interviewing Children and Young People," last modified 2009, https://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/ESOMAR_Codes-and-Guidelines_Interviewing-Children-and-Young-People.pdf.
[333] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Third ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2015), 93-95.

provide any documentation the site administrator might require for approval and follow up with an email for documentation. Permission will be requested from each site administrator and religion teacher to appear in their religion classroom to briefly describe the study and invite students to participate.

10. Procedures: This will be a narrative interview study. Participants will be invited to spend up to fifty minutes telling stories, answering follow up questions and answering several semi-structured interview questions. The entire interview will be recorded on the researcher's iPhone or back up digital recorder. Below are the interview questions:
    a. May I ask you to tell me about how you came to attend this Christian school and how your social experience has been so far?
    b. May I ask you to describe your social world, who do you hang out with and why? May I ask you to describe what social groups exist on campus and how they relate to each other?
    c. May I ask you to tell me about a time when you showed kindness, caring, or compassion to someone outside your friend group? May I ask how would you describe these types of situations? May I ask you what motivated you to respond in the way that you did? May I ask you, how did the situation unfold and playout? May I ask you, what did you think about the entire event afterwards? May I ask you, are there more stories you can tell me about?
    d. May I ask you to tell me about a time when you *wanted* to show kindness, caring, or compassion to someone outside your friend group *but couldn't, or chose not to*? May I ask you what motivated you to respond in the way that you did? May I ask you, how did the situation unfold and playout? May I ask you, what did you think about the entire event afterwards? May I ask you, are there more stories you can tell me about?
    e. May I ask you to describe the role religion and spirituality play in your motivation and decisions to show kindness, caring, or compassion to peers outside your friend group?
    f. May I ask you to describe the role you would *like* religion and spirituality to play in your motivation and decisions to show kindness, caring, or compassion to peers outside your friend group?
11. Respect for Participants: The interview procedure is voluntary and framed in a way that students may decline to answer a question. The interaction will be framed as the opportunity for each participant to tell their stories and describe their situations in their own terms. By emphasizing their descriptive role in this research, I hope to show each adolescent respect and appreciation for their perception and contribution.
12. Potential Risks: Interviewees will be asked to tell stories about prosocial cross-group interactions but the stories may include elements of anti-social behavior and social difficulty. Additionally, stories and follow up questions will likely include the sharing of religious and spiritual experiences and beliefs. These topics could potentially create

emotional responses of discomfort. Participants are not specifically asked to reveal embarrassing or sensitive information about themselves, however, if details in the stories they tell include such information, confidentiality will be maintained at all stages with regard to the participant and anyone else named in their interview responses. No protected health information is to be collected. There is no deception in this study.

13. Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be protected in the following ways. Each interview will be given a number that corresponds with the interviewee's real name and contact information. The number will be the identifier on the digital audio file and the transcription. The list matching the participant's name with the data number will be on a password protected document. I am the only one who will transcribe the interviews. Names of the participant and anyone else mentioned by name in the interviews will be given pseudonyms for the transcriptions, analysis, and dissertation. The participant's name, school name, and class name will not be mentioned, only their age and region. The audio recording made during the interview with the participant will not have their name on the recording and will be destroyed after it is transcribed and analyzed, no later than November 1, 2019. Contact information and transcripts will be digitally erased by July 1, 2021. I am the only one who will have access to personally identifiable information.
14. Contributions of Research: Research in adolescent prosocial behavior provides insight for all who work with adolescents for encouraging and supporting their prosocial development. Religious educators, church youth ministry leaders, parents, and adolescents can benefit from better understanding how religion and spirituality influence prosocial behavior, especially in situations of cross-group prosociality. This research project invites adolescents to describe and tell stories about how they experience cross-group prosocial motivation and behavior in their religious context. By inviting adolescents to share stories from their personal experience, this study will add their unique narrative perspective to the body of knowledge that informs all who work with adolescents.
15. Proof of CITI: Attached Certificate of completion for training on the Protection of Human Participants through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI).

Appendix A.2: IRB Proposal Informed Consent Forms for Parents and Students

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Religious and Spiritual Influences in Adolescent Prosocial Cross-Group Interactions: A Qualitative Study Among Students in Christian Secondary Schools

Parent Consent Form

We invite your adolescent, _____ [name of adolescent] to participate in a research study conducted at the Claremont School of Theology by **Robert Skoretz**, a student in the **Practical Theology Ph.D.** program at Claremont School of Theology. This researcher may be contacted at any time at 1250 South Barton Road, Colton, CA 92324, 909-649-6727, robert.skoretz@cst.edu.

Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook is the CST faculty advisor for this study. Your adolescent's _____ [name of adolescent] participation in this study is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not your adolescent _____ [name of adolescent] may participate.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to learn how religion and spirituality influence adolescents to treat their peers with the prosocial values of love, compassion, and caring. The study will specifically look at what motivates adolescents to interact prosocially with peers who are outside their friend groups. By inviting adolescents to share stories from their personal experience, this study will add their unique narrative perspective to the body of knowledge that informs all who work with adolescents.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into practical theology, pastoral care and/or spiritual care. Participation in this study should not be regarded as—or substituted for—therapy by a licensed professional.

- **DURATION AND LOCATION**

Participation in this study will consist of one scheduled 50 minute interview, March 4-June 30, 2019, at the school your adolescent attends and, if necessary, one follow up phone call for clarifications.

- **PROCEDURE**

If you allow your adolescent _____ [name of adolescent] to participate in this study, we would ask them to describe their social world. We would ask them to tell one or more stories about a time when they showed kindness, caring, or compassion to someone outside their friend group; or a time they wanted to act but couldn't or chose not to act. Follow up questions may include asking about how they understood the situation, what motivated them, and what happened. We would ask them to describe

the role religion and spirituality play in their motivation and decisions to interact prosocially with peers outside their friend groups; and the role they would like religion and spirituality to play in their cross-group prosocial motivation and decision-making.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Risks involved in this study include any potential discomfort arising from experiences they might describe in their stories that were negative or distressing, either to themselves or to the person with which they were interacting. Another potential discomfort could arise if there are any negative or distressing associations with their religious or spiritual history.

If at any time they feel uncomfortable, they are free to rest or to stop participating in the study.

- **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

You have the right to refuse permission for your adolescent _____ [name of adolescent] to participate in this study. You may also choose to withdraw your adolescent _____ [name of adolescent] at any time from the study.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your adolescent's _____ [name of adolescent] identity. Your adolescent's name, school name, and class name will not be mentioned, only their age and region. The audio recording made during the interview with your adolescent _____ [name of adolescent] will not have their name on the recording and will be destroyed after it is transcribed and analyzed, no later than November 1, 2019.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you do not allow your adolescent to participate, that will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology. If you allow your adolescent _____ [name of adolescent] to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue their participation at any time without prejudice.

- **WITHDRAWAL OF PARTICIPATION BY THE INVESTIGATOR**

The investigator may withdraw your adolescent _____ [name of adolescent] from participating in this research if the investigator believes that withdrawal from the study is in the adolescent's _____ [name of adolescent] best interest.

- **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address, contact the primary investigator, **Robert Skoretz** at **909-649-6727** or send an email to **robert.skoretz@cst.edu.** This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is **2019-0204.** If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by email at irb@cst.edu.

- **SIGNATURE OF PARENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Legal Guardian *Name of Participant*

_____

Signature of Legal Guardian *Date*

_____

Address

_____

Phone *Email*

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

_____

Signature of Investigator *Date (same as participant's)*

A copy of this signed document will be scanned and emailed to you for your records.

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Religious and Spiritual Influences in Adolescent Prosocial Cross-Group Interactions: A Qualitative Study Among Students in Christian Secondary Schools

Student Assent Form for Students under 18 years old

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted at the Claremont School of Theology by **Robert Skoretz**, a student in the **Practical Theology Ph.D.** program at Claremont School of Theology. This researcher may be contacted at any time at 1250 South Barton Road, Colton, CA 92324, 909-649-6727, robert.skoretz@cst.edu. **Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook** is the CST faculty advisor for this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not you wish to participate.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to learn how religion and spirituality influence adolescents to treat their peers with the prosocial values of love, compassion, and caring. The study will specifically look at what motivates adolescents to interact prosocially with peers who are outside their friend groups. By inviting adolescents to share stories from their personal experience, this study will add their unique narrative perspective to the body of knowledge that informs all who work with adolescents.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into practical theology, pastoral care and/or spiritual care. Participation in this study should not be regarded as—or substituted for—therapy by a licensed professional.

- **DURATION AND LOCATION**

Participation in this study will consist of one scheduled 50 minute interview, March 4-June 30, 2019, at your school and, if necessary, one follow up phone call for clarifications.

- **PROCEDURE**

If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to describe your social world. I would ask you to tell one or more stories about a time when you showed kindness, caring, or compassion to someone outside your friend group; or a time you wanted to act but couldn't or chose not to act. Follow up questions may include asking about how you understood the situation, what motivated you, and what happened. I would ask you to describe the role religion and spirituality play in your motivation and

decisions to interact prosocially with peers outside your friend group; and the role you would like religion and spirituality to play in your cross-group prosocial motivation and decision-making.

You will be compensated. At the beginning of the interview you will be given a $15 Starbucks gift card in appreciation for your participation and time.

● POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Risks involved in this study include any potential discomfort arising from experiences you might describe in your stories that were negative or distressing, either to yourself or to the person with which you were interacting. Another potential discomfort could arise if there are any negative or distressing associations with your religious or spiritual history.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you are free to rest or to stop participating in the study.

● ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You may also choose to withdraw at any time from the study.

● CONFIDENTIALITY

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. Your name, school name, and class name will not be mentioned, only your age and region. The audio recording made during the interview will not have your name on the recording and will be destroyed after it is transcribed and analyzed, no later than November 1, 2019.

● PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, that will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology. If you do participate, you are free to withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

● WITHDRAWAL OF PARTICIPATION BY THE INVESTIGATOR

The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if the investigator believes that withdrawal from the study is in your best interest.

- **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address, contact the primary investigator, **Robert Skoretz** at **909-649-6727** or send an email to **robert.skoretz@cst.edu.** This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is **2019-0204.**

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by email at irb@cst.edu.

- **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I assent to participate in this research. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Participant

_____

Signature of Participant *Date*

_____

Address

_____

Phone *Email*

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

_____

Signature of Investigator *Date (same as participant's)*

A copy of this signed document will be scanned and emailed to you for your records.

STUDENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Religious and Spiritual Influences in Adolescent Prosocial Cross-Group Interactions: A Qualitative Study Among Students in Christian Secondary Schools

Student Consent Form for Students 18 years and older

Identification of Investigator and Purpose of Study

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled "Religious and Spiritual Influences in Adolescent Prosocial Cross-Group Interactions: A Qualitative Study Among Students in Christian Secondary Schools." The study is being conducted by Robert Skoretz under the supervision of Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook of Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N. College Ave; Claremont, CA 91711, skujawa-holbrook@cst.edu, 909/447-2520 (office).

The purpose of this research study is to learn how religion and spirituality influence adolescents to treat their peers with the prosocial values of love, compassion, and caring. The study will specifically look at what motivates adolescents to interact prosocially with peers who are outside their friend groups. By inviting adolescents to share stories from their personal experience, this study will add their unique narrative perspective to the body of knowledge that informs all who work with adolescents. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction. You are free to contact the investigator using the information below to discuss the study.

Robert Skoretz, 1250 South Barton Road, Colton, CA 92324, 909-649-6727, robert.skoretz@cst.edu.

We are asking for your consent. Thank you!

If you agree to participate:

- Participation in this study will consist of one scheduled 50 minute interview, March 4-June 30, 2019, at the school you attend and, if necessary, one follow up phone call for clarifications.
- Your participation is intended to contribute to a better understanding of adolescent prosocial cross-group interaction.
- Your participation will consist in the following: we would ask you to describe your social world. We would ask you to tell one or more stories about a time when you showed kindness, caring, or compassion to someone outside your friend group; or a time you wanted to act but couldn't or chose not to act. Follow up questions may include asking about how you understood the situation, what motivated you, and what happened. We would ask you to describe the role religion and spirituality play in your motivation and decisions to interact prosocially with peers outside your friend group; and the role you would like religion and spirituality to play in your cross-group prosocial motivation and decision-making.
- You will be compensated. At the beginning of the interview you will be given a $15 Starbucks gift card in appreciation for your participation and time.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into practical theology, pastoral care and/or spiritual care. Participation in this study should not be regarded as—or substituted for—therapy by a licensed professional.

Risks and Confidentiality of Data

Risks involved in this study include any potential discomfort arising from experiences you might describe in your stories that are

negative or distressing, either to yourself or to the person with which you were interacting. Another potential discomfort could arise if there are any negative or distressing associations with your religious or spiritual history. There will be no costs for participating. Your name, email address, phone number, and other personally identifiable information will be kept during the data collection phase. No personally identifiable information will be publicly released. Your personal information will be used solely for tracking purposes. I am the sole researcher and I am the only one who will have access to the data.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your adolescent's identity. Your name, school name, and class name will not be mentioned, only your age and region. The audio recording made during the interview with you will not have your name on the recording and will be destroyed after it is transcribed and analyzed, no later than November 1, 2019.

Participation or Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology in any way. If you do not want to participate, you may simply stop participating.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address or phone number contact the primary investigator Robert Skoretz at 909-649-6727 or send an email to robert.skoretz@cst.edu, or contact the advisor Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook at 909/447-2520 or email to skujawa-holbrook@cst.edu. This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is **2019-0204**.

Questions about your rights as a research participant.

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by email at irb@cst.edu.

Thank you.

- **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Participant

_____

Signature of Participant *Date*

_____

Address

_____

Phone *Email*

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

_____

Signature of Investigator *Date (same as participant's)*

A copy of this signed document will be scanned and emailed to you for your records.

Appendix A.3: IRB Proposal Certification of Researcher's CITI Completion

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Robert Skoretz (ID: 4649703)
- **Email:** robert.skoretz@cst.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Claremont School of Theology (ID: 2897)
- **Institution Unit:** Ph.D. Practical Theology RE
- **Phone:** 9096496727

- **Curriculum Group:** Students conducting no more than minimal risk research
- **Course Learner Group:** Students - Class projects
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** This course is appropriate for students doing class projects that qualify as "No More Than Minimal Risk" human subjects research.

- **Report ID:** 15177238
- **Completion Date:** 02/15/2015
- **Expiration Date:** 02/14/2018
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 85

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY DATE COMPLETED SCORE Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction 02/15/15 3/3 (100%) Students in Research 02/15/15 8/10 (80%) Completing the Human Subjects Research (HSR) Course 02/15/15 No Quiz

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program Email: citisupport@miami.edu Phone: 305-243-7970 Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT REPORT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Robert Skoretz (ID: 4649703)
- **Email:** robert.skoretz@cst.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Claremont School of Theology (ID: 2897)
- **Institution Unit:** Ph.D. Practical Theology RE
- **Phone:** 9096496727

- **Curriculum Group:** Students conducting no more than minimal risk research
- **Course Learner Group:** Students - Class projects
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** This course is appropriate for students doing class projects that qualify as "No More Than Minimal Risk" human subjects research.

- **Report ID:** 15177238
- **Report Date:** 02/15/2015
- **Current Score**:** 85

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES MOST RECENT SCORE Students in Research 02/15/15 8/10 (80%) Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction 02/15/15 3/3 (100%) Completing the Human Subjects Research (HSR) Course 02/15/15 No Quiz

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program Email: citisupport@miami.edu Phone: 305-243-7970 Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. May I ask you to tell me about how you came to attend this Christian school and how your social experience has been so far?
2. May I ask you to describe your social world, who do you hang out with and why? May I ask you to describe what social groups exist on campus and how they relate to each other?
3. May I ask you to tell me about a time when you showed kindness, caring, or compassion to someone outside your friend group? May I ask how would you describe these types of situations? May I ask you what motivated you to respond in the way that you did? May I ask you, how did the situation unfold and playout? May I ask you, what did you think about the entire event afterwards? May I ask you, are there more stories you can tell me about?
4. May I ask you to tell me about a time when you wanted to show kindness, caring, or compassion to someone outside your friend group but couldn't, or chose not to? May I ask you what motivated you to respond in the way that you did? May I ask you, how did the situation unfold and playout? May I ask you, what did you think about the entire event afterwards? May I ask you, are there more stories you can tell me about?
5. May I ask you to define religion and spirituality in your own words? How do you see them as similar and how do you see them as different?*
6. May I ask you to describe the role religion and spirituality play in your motivation and decisions to show kindness, caring, or compassion to peers outside your friend group?
7. May I ask you to describe the role you would like religion and spirituality to play in your motivation and decisions to show kindness, caring, or compassion to peers outside your friend group?
8. Is there anything you would like to add to this interview?

*This question was added at the seventh interview as I found it helpful for a number of students to talk first about what the terms meant to them before answering the question about the role the two terms played in their motivation for acts of kindness.

Appendix C.1: Examples of kindness from interviews

Challenging bad behavior	Serving on Mission trips
Checking up on people	Being present for others
Complimenting others	Reaching out to excluded peers
Counseling peers	Respecting others
Being friendly	Respecting privacy
Offering friendship	Smiling
Giving to others	Standing up for someone
Helping	Teaching
Inspiring others to succeed	Providing temporary belonging
Knowing someone's name	Sharing your personal experience with others
Leading others by example	Being kind even when someone is mean
Serving as a leader	Writing warm notes to people
Listening	Resolving conflict
Looking your best for others	

Appendix C.2: Examples of religious and spiritual influences from interviews

Religious	Spiritual
Become a good person	Campus spiritual emphasis
Campus religious curriculum	Conscience
Christian Identity	Giving back to Jesus
Classroom religious curriculum	God as liberator
Doing evangelism	God's example
Example of Jesus	God's love
Extrinsic from biblical commands	God's power at work
Extrinsic to be right with God	Love for God
Golden rule	
Personal bible reading	
Religious events	
Religious upbringing	
Religious witness	
Respect for God's creation	
Teacher testimony	
Teachings of Jesus	

Appendix C.3: Wishes for religious and spiritual influences from interviews

Personal Wishes	Suggestions
Christian students less hypocritical	Adults be more honest
Do more	Adults have empathy
God was more a part	Church would accept LGBTQ
Intrinsic	Church more forgiving
More involved in church	Church not so judgmental
More patience and less anger	Church treat sin in the Bible more consistently
Overcome fear	More testimonies in all classes
Less about self, more about Jesus' example	Pastors related to teens better
	Religion classes more practical
	Religion teachers more competent less forceful
	School should do more relational activities
	Teachers enforce rules consistently
	Teachers more approachable
	Teachers more open minded

Appendix C.4: Barriers to kindness from interviews

Being a new student to school	Fear of being rejected
Being distracted	Fear of not doing it right
Being ignorant	Fear of offending others
Being irritated by others' behavior	Feeling awkward
Being judgmental	Feeling peer pressure
Being lazy	Growing tired of church
Being moody	Holding onto strong disagreements
Being petty on social media	Lacking competence
Being required to do service hours	Lacking emotional literacy
Being selfish	Lacking trust
Being shy	Not listening
Being stubborn	Not wanting to do anything
Being too busy	Picking on those different from you
Clinging to one's friend group	Protecting one's friend group
Faith differences	Reacting to being hurt by others
Fear of being bullied	Showing weakness
Fear of being hurt by violence	Struggling to accept one's self
Fear of being judged by others	Thinking they might not want it
Fear of being judged by race	

Appendix C.5: Suggestions for motivating kindness in teens from interviews

Churches model kindness	Recognize adolescent growth and maturing process
Create a caring campus	Recognize kindness as an identity
Create cross-group social opportunities	Recognize self-serving motivations
Create positive opportunities for responsibility and leadership	Require acts of kindness
Create practical community service opportunities	Students give testimonies
Dramatic representations of kindness	Students lead by example
Encourage considering consequences of negative behavior	Support intrinsic motivation from difficult personal experiences
Encourage considering consequences of positive behavior	Support positive peer pressure
Encourage empathy	Support self-acceptance and care
Encourage listening	Teach communication skills
Encourage overcoming ignorance about people	Teach emotional literacy
Encourage solidarity	Teacher give personal testimonies
Encourage stepping outside comfort zone	Teachers caring toward students
Encourage suspension of judgment	Teachers give creative options more than negative restrictions
Parents give advice on kindness	Teachers modeling kindness
Parents give testimony	Teachers teaching kindness
Parents model kindness	Teach health benefits of kindness
Parents raise kids to be kind	Teach respect for all

Pastors model kindness	Teach that God can use you
Plan spiritual events	